

#1

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STAR REACH



STARLIN

CONTENTS

death building
the birth of death • the origin of god
by Jim Starlin

fish myths • suburban fish
by Steve Skeates

a tale of sword and sorcery
by Ed Hicks (writing)
& Walt Simonson (drawing)

cody starbuck
by Howie Chaykin

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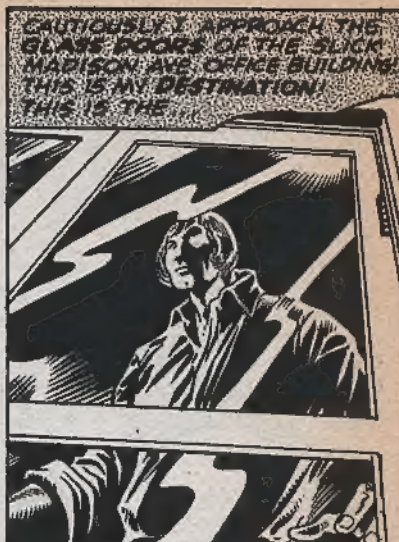
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ANY SIMILARITY TO REAL PERSONS, LIVING OR DEAD, EXCEPT FOR THE PURPOSES OF SATIRE, IS COINCIDENTAL.



EARLY
EVENING
NEW
YORK CITY!

MY NAME'S APOLLO, STEVE
APOLLO! I MAKE MY WAY THRU
THE LATE RUSH HOUR CROWD,
SCARCELY NOTICING THEM!
MY MIND'S ON MY MISSION!



CAUTIOUSLY I APPROACH THE
GLASS DOORS OF THE SLICK
MADISON AVE. OFFICE BUILDING!
THIS IS MY DESTINATION!
THIS IS THE

DEATH BUILDING

© STARLIN 1974



I ENTER! THERE'S
NO TURNING
BACK NOW!

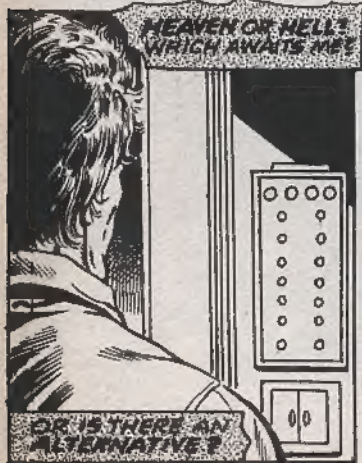
THE PRICE IS HIGH, BUT WHAT
IS A SOUL COMPARED TO LIFE
ETERNAL?



THE SEVEN HAVE
SHOWN ME THE
WAY! I MUST
FOLLOW!

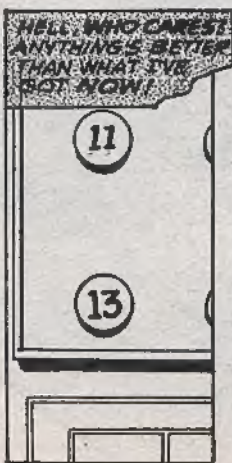


THE FIRST ELEVATOR ON THE
RIGHT! IT BECKONS LIKE AN
UNSPOKEN PROMISE!



HEAVEN OR HELL?
WHICH AWAITS ME?

OR IS THERE AN
ALTERNATIVE?



HELL, WHO CARES?
ANYTHING'S BETTER
THAN WHAT I'VE
GOT NOW!



11TH FLOOR, HERE
I COME! NOW ALL
I NEED IS THE



...ACID!

YOU SEE, I'M AFTER **DEATH**...

6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18

... AND YOU'VE
GOT TO BE
ELECTRIC TO
FACE HIM...

THIS IS **NO** JOB FOR A MAN!

ONE MUST BE
ABOVE SUCH THINGS
TO WIN AT THIS **SPORT**!

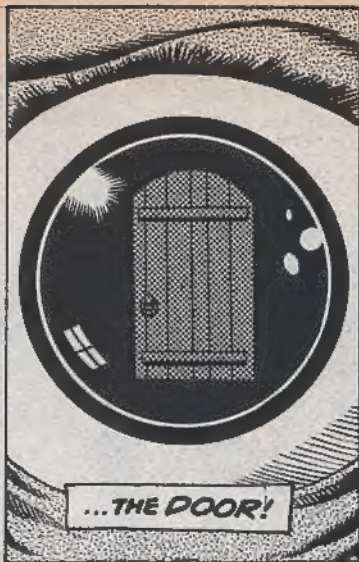
THE **SEVEN** TAUGHT ME THIS **GAME**!

THEY SHOWED ME THE WAY
TO **BEAT** THE HOUSE!

THE GAME IS
DEATH!

THERE IT IS! THE GREAT CASTLE OF
THE LOST! HOME OF THE HALL OF
THE DEAD! FEW HAVE SEEN IT NONE
HAVE EVER RETURNED TO DESCRIBE IT!
DEATH LIKES HIS **PRIVACY**!

I ENTER WITHOUT TROUBLE,
GETTING IN IS ALWAYS EASY!
DOWN THE MAZE OF PASSAGE-
WAYS I CREEP UNTIL I REACH...



...THE DOOR!



ENTER!

WELCOME, SEEKER OF LIFE!
YOU'VE MADE YOUR
CHOICE!

THE BUTTERFLY GOES FREE.
YOU HAVE CHOSEN THE DARK
THING!

SO I'VE PAID
THE PRICE OF
ADMISSION!
WHERE'S MY
DOOR
PRIZE?

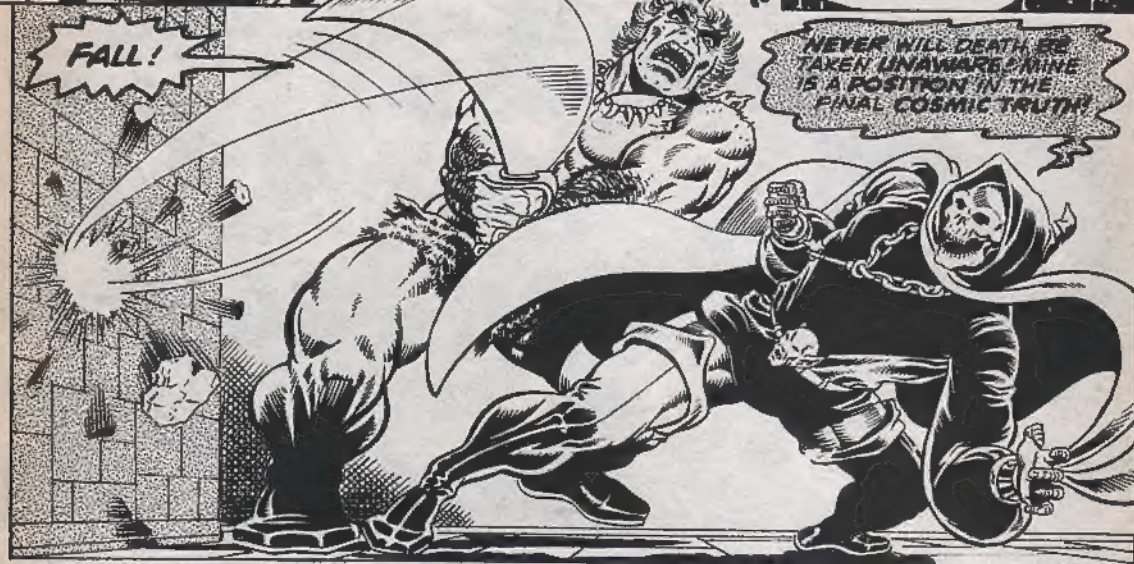
ETERNAL
LIFE!

OR ETERNAL
DAMNATION!

SUCH IS THE
PRICE DEMANDED
UPON CHALLENG-
ING DEATH AND
LOSING!

I'M NOT ABOUT TO FAIL!
THE SEVEN HAVE TAUGHT ME
SURVIVAL!

AS THEY TAUGHT THOSE WHO
CAME BEFORE YOU! YET STILL
DEATH REIGNS!



NOW!

IN ALL THE **UNIVERSE**
THERE IS NOTHING MORE
CERTAIN THAN **CHANGE!**

ALL THINGS
PASS, EVEN...

DEATH!

YOU MOUTH **PLATITUDES**
FED YOU BY THE **SEVEN**,
WHO USE YOU FOR THEIR
OWN **GOALS!**

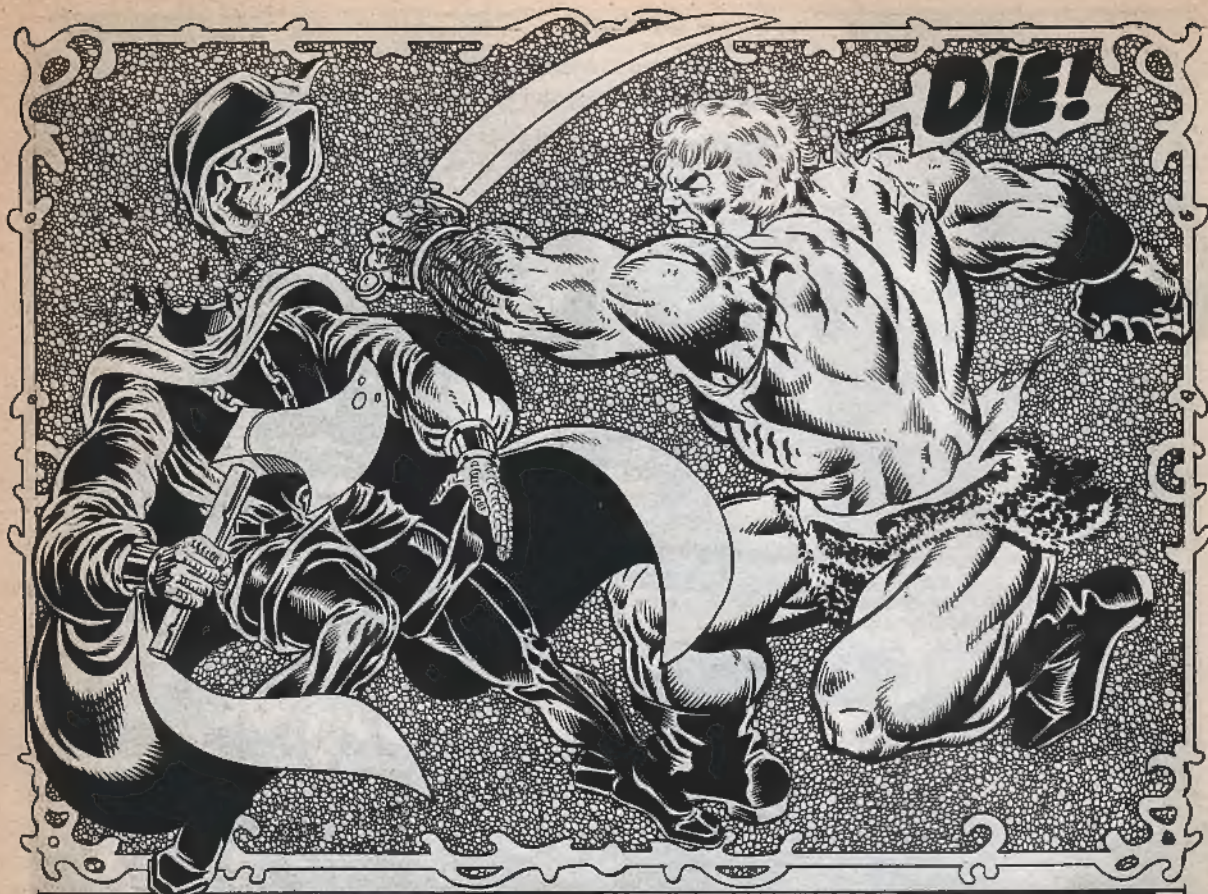
BUT WORDS SHALL
NOT CONQUER THE
UNIVERSAL TRUTH
WHICH DEFENDS ME!

TRUTH!?
BAH!!

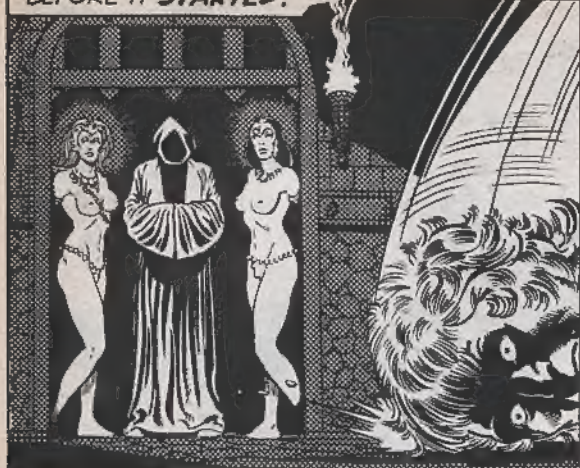
WHAT GOOD ARE
SUCH **BARRIERS**
AGAINST A **BEING**
OF **IMAGINATION?**

WHAT I
WISH ...**IS!**
SUCH **GENIUS**
CONQUERS
ALL!

SO **DEATH**, WHO HAS
REIGNED SINCE NEAR
THE **BEGINNING** MUST
NOW...



I GUESS I'VE REALLY BLOWN IT! EVEN BEFORE I HIT THE FLOOR, DEATH'S TWO MAIDENS AND A COLLECTOR ENTER UNBIDDEN! THEY KNEW EVEN BEFORE IT STARTED!



THE MAIDENS REPLACE DEATH'S HEAD! IT'D ALMOST BE FUNNY IF I WASN'T LYING ON THIS STONE FLOOR BLEEDING TO DEATH!

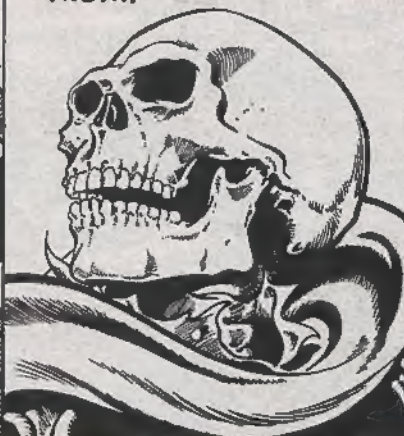


THE DARK ROBED FIGURE CARRIES ME OUT, AS DEATH INSTRUCTS HIM WHERE TO DISPOSE OF ME!

ONLY THEN DO I BEGIN TO REALIZE THE TRUTH!



THE SEVEN LIED TO ME! THEY TOLD ME EVERYTHING BUT THE REAL TRUTH!



THE ONLY



TRUTH



IS

DEATH!

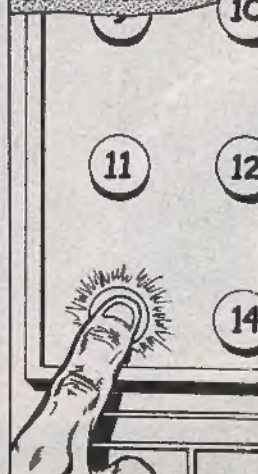
MY NAME IS STARLIN, JIM STARLIN. I'VE FOUND THE BUILDING, THE ELEVATOR AND THE WAY!



I ENTER THE DARK ELEVATOR, IGNORING THE FRESHLY DEAD BODY!



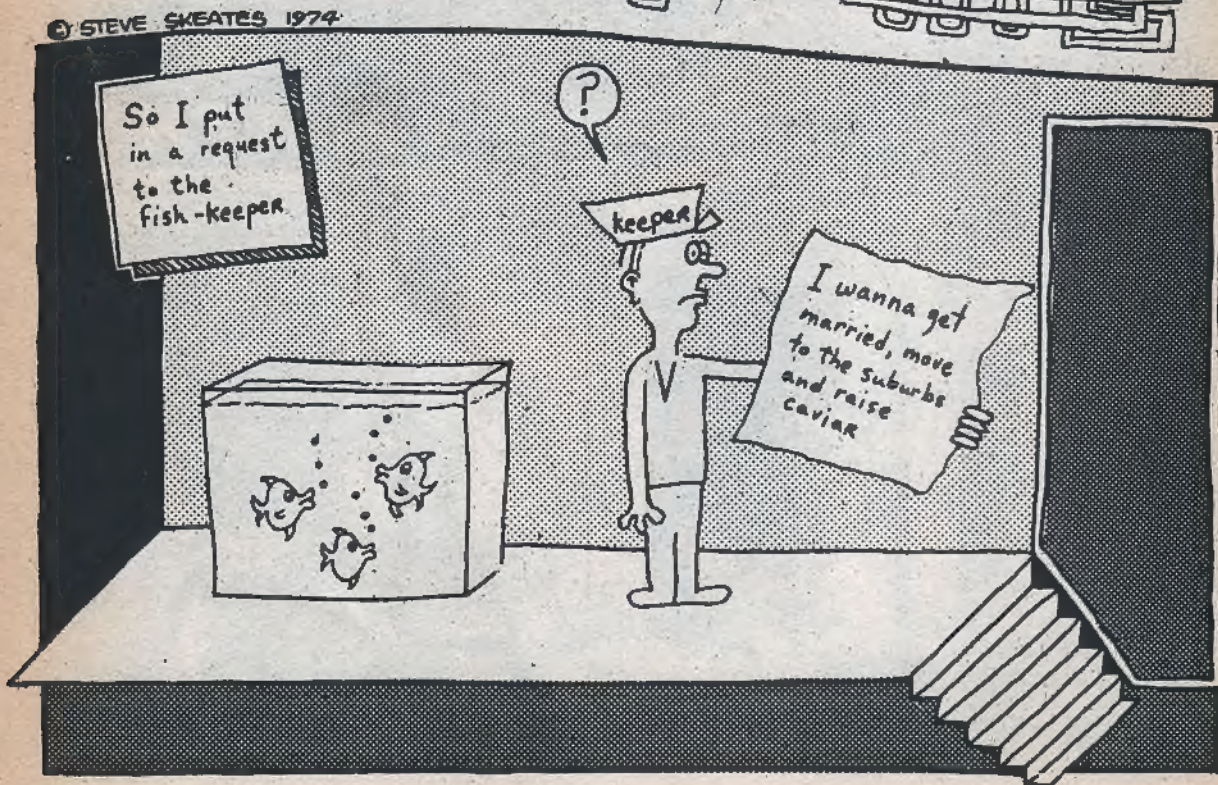
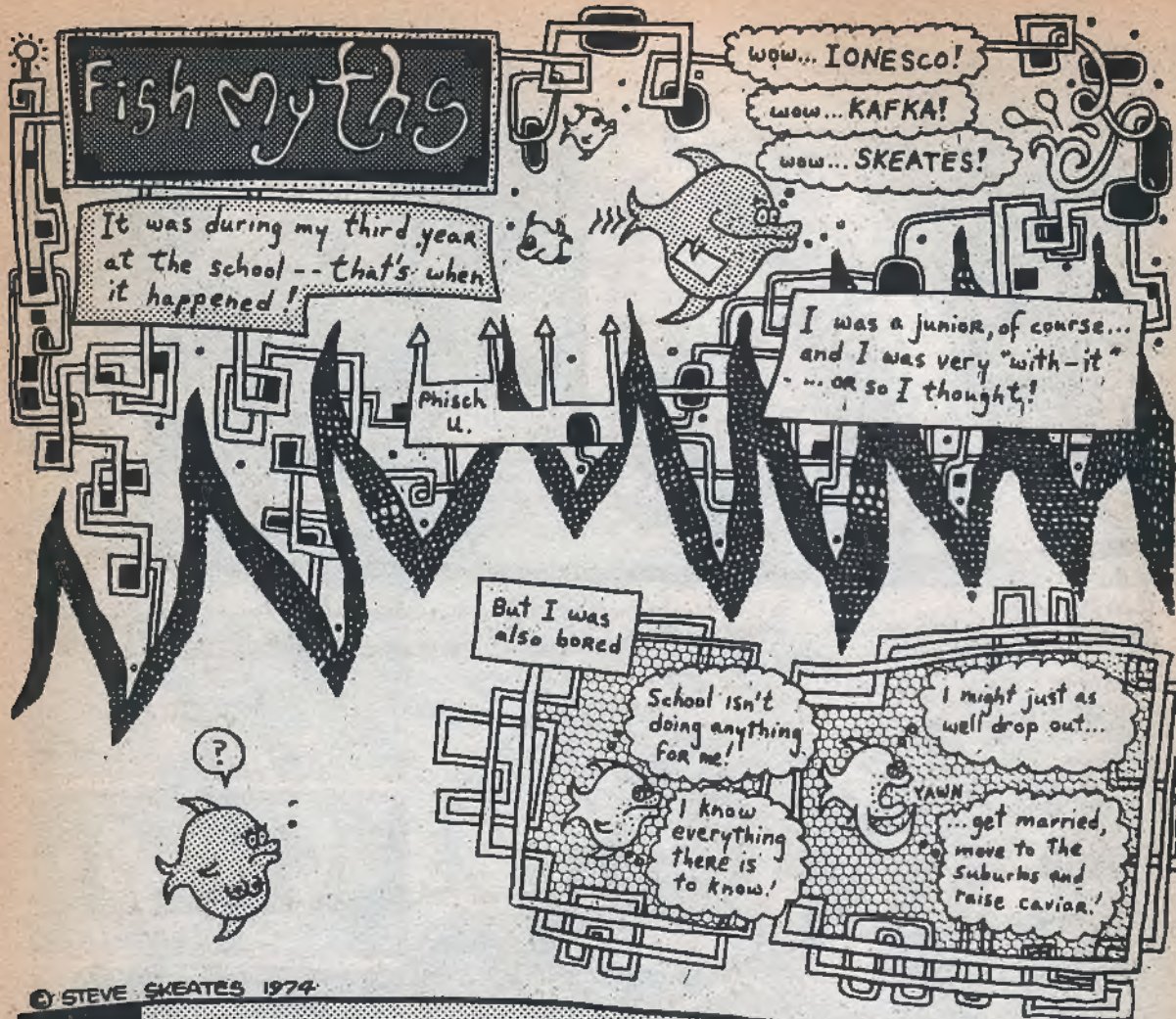
I PUSH MY FLOOR'S BUTTON! I PULL OUT MY ACID!

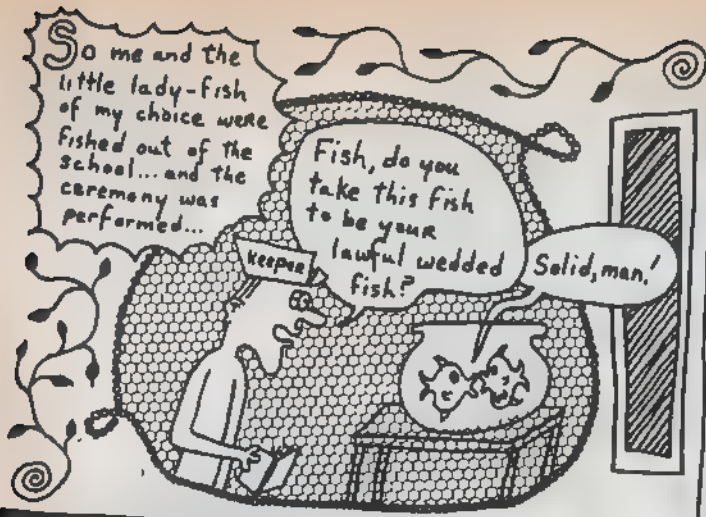


I'VE GOT A FEELING THIS IS REALLY GOING TO BE SOME TRIP!



END



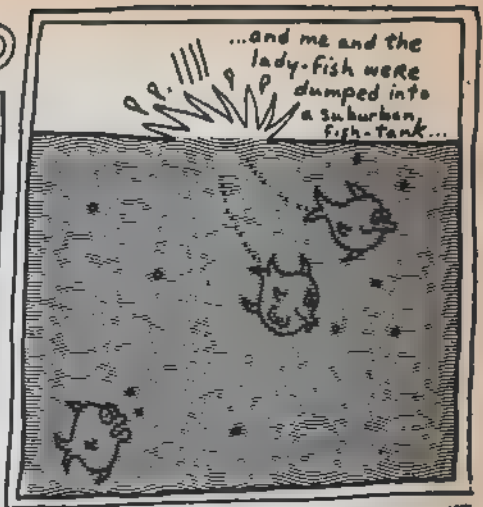


So me and the little lady-fish of my choice were fished out of the school...and the ceremony was performed...

Fish, do you take this fish to be your lawful wedded fish?

Keepsa

Solid, man!



...and me and the lady-fish were dumped into a suburban fish-tank...

But I couldn't relate to the other fish there in the suburban fish-tank...they had a different set of values...

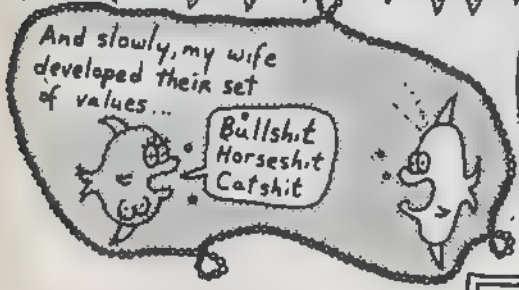


wow... Bullshit!

wow... Horseshit!

wow... Coughit!

?



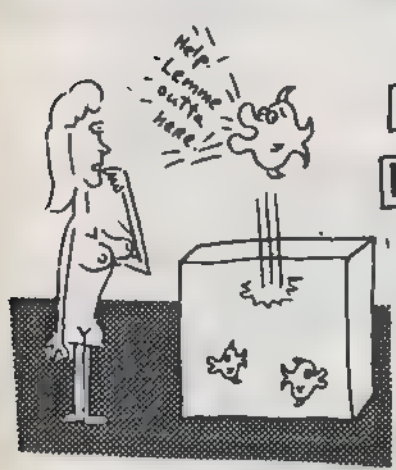
And slowly, my wife developed their set of values...

Bullshit
Horseshit
Catshit

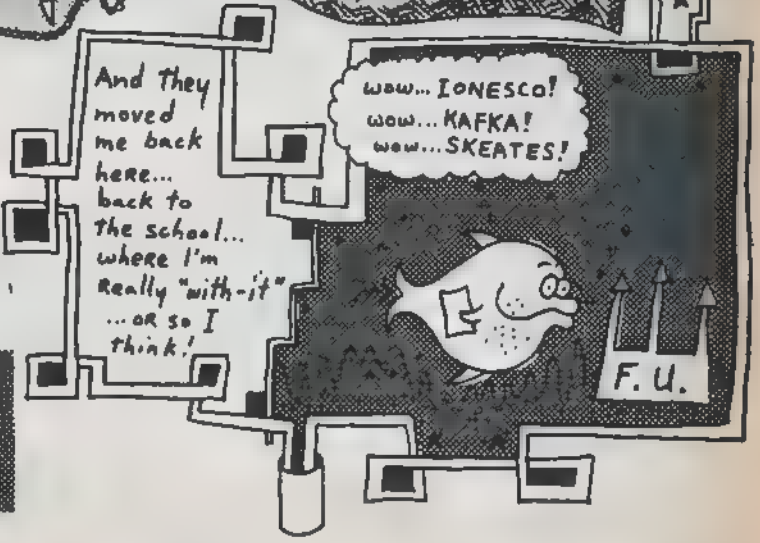


No! I don't want to develop lousy values like that myself!

I gotta get out!



Help!
Lemme
outta
here!



And they moved me back here... back to the school... where I'm really "with-it" ...or so I think!

wow... IONESCO!
wow... KAFKA!
wow... SKEATES!

F.U.

END

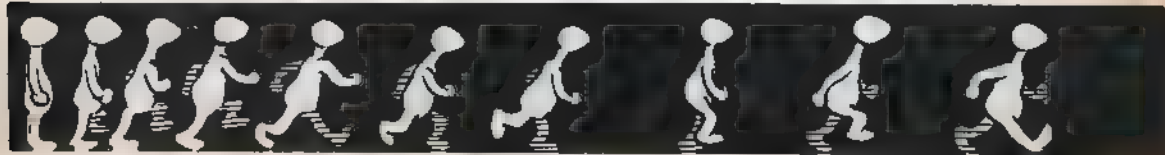


A TALE OF SWORD & SORCERY

WRITING: BO HICKS
DRAWING: WALT SIMONSON

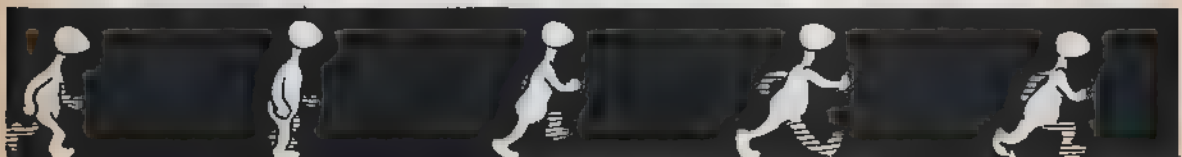


reminiscent of
heroic deeds...





in the days of
yon and yore,
etc., etc., etc...



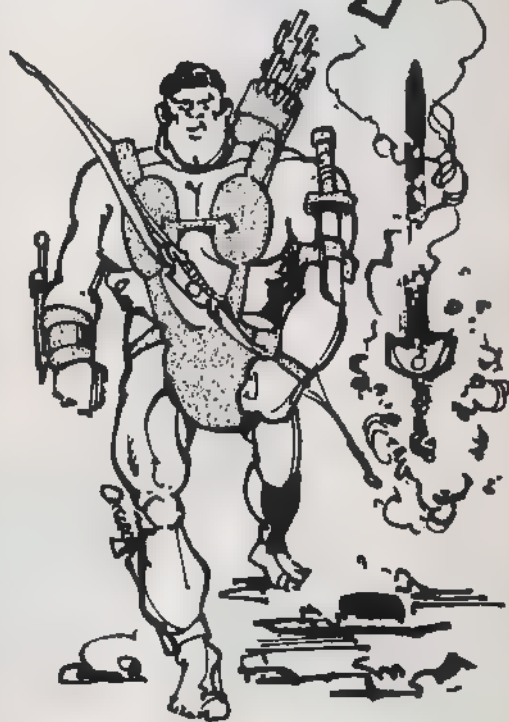
GRADUALLY, OUT OF THE RAMPANTLY MORDANT CHAOS

EVOLVE THE SHAPES OF TWO HOMO-SAPIENS-BASED OBJECTS. ONE

OF DESTRUCTION HUNG IN
VARIOUS PLACES ON HIS
COSTUME. WE SEE THE
SWORD MENTIONED IN
THE EPIC TITLE.

OP THE CREATURES IS MORE

THAN HEROIC-IN ADDITION TO NUMEROUS ITEMS

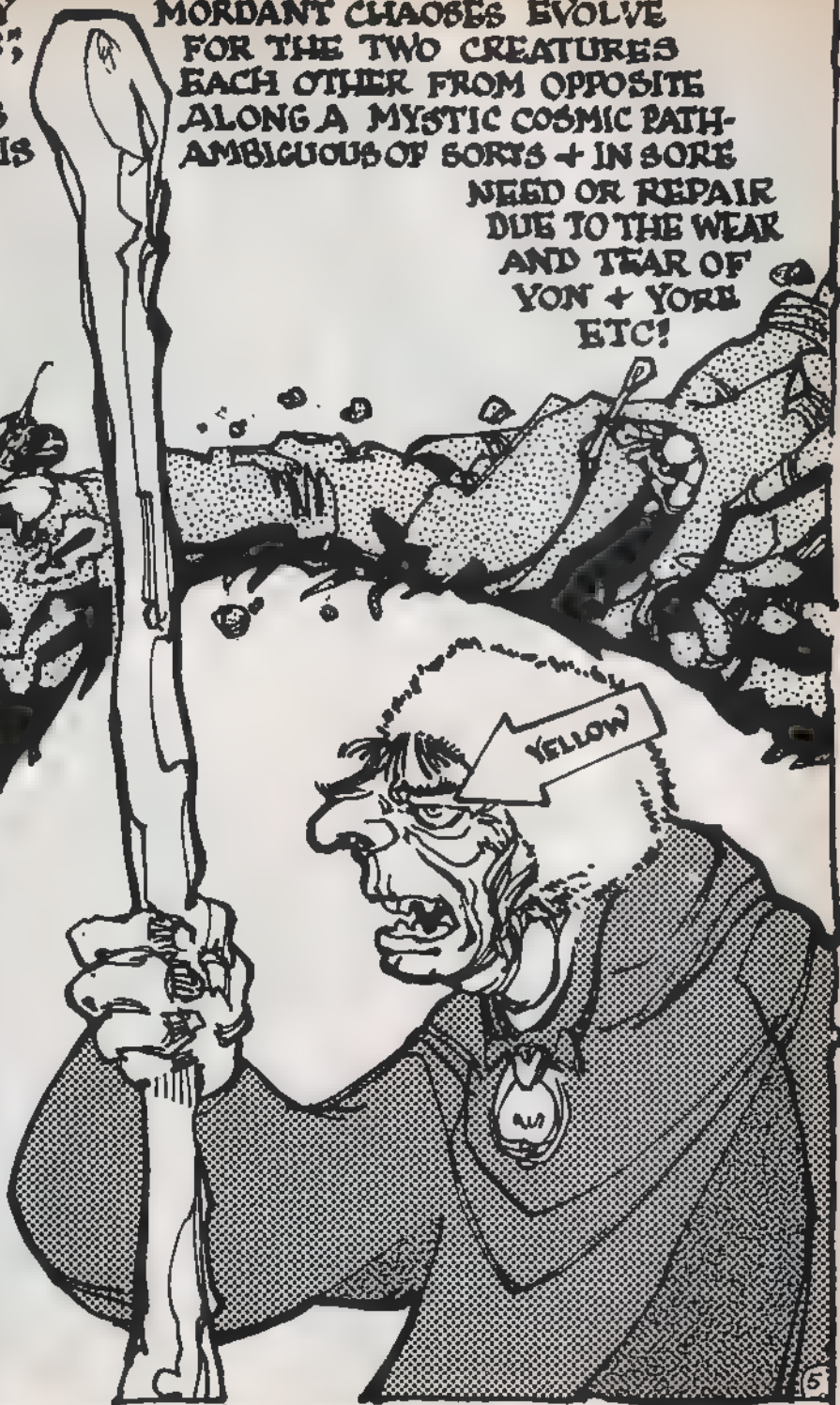


ACTUALLY, IT SHOULD HAVE SAID "OUT OF TWO
ARAMPANTLY
THE SHAPES",
APPROACH
DIRECTIONS
WAY WHICH IS

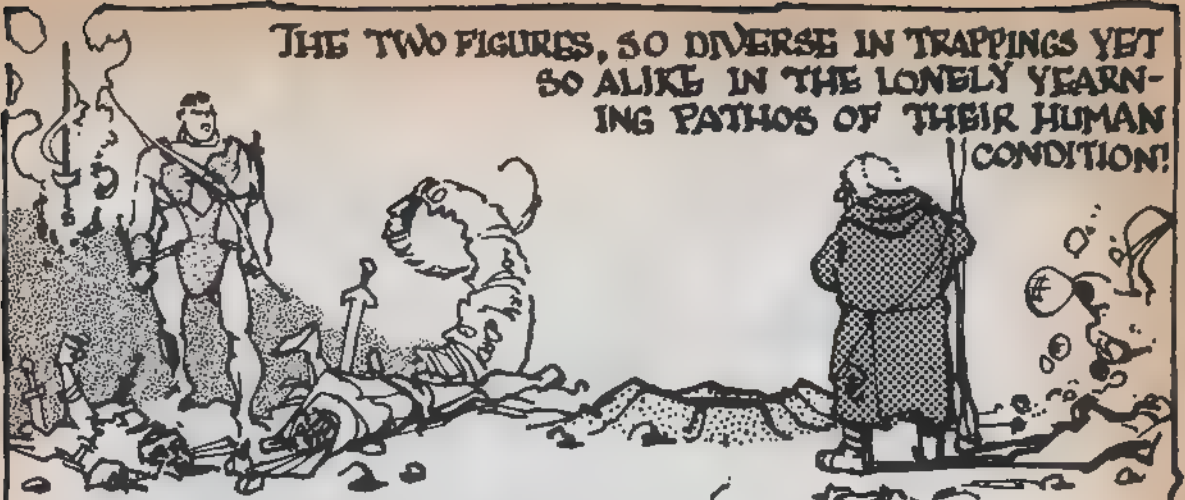
MORDANT CHAOSSES EVOLVE
FOR THE TWO CREATURES
EACH OTHER FROM OPPOSITE
ALONG A MYSTIC COSMIC PATH-
AMBIGUOUS OF SORTS + IN SORE

NEED OR REPAIR
DUE TO THE WEAR
AND TEAR OF
YON + YOKE
ETC!

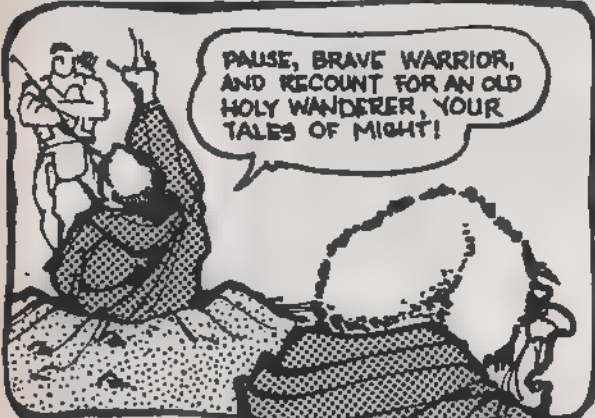
NOW, FOR A
TERSE DES-
CRPTION
OF PLAYER
TWO IN OUR
UNIVERSE
SPANNING
SAGA~ HE
IS A BEAT
TO SHIT
CRONE TYPE,
TATTERS
LONG AND
BROKEN
FINGERS,
TEETH, HAIR
AND SO FORTH



THE TWO FIGURES, SO DIVERSE IN TRAPPINGS YET
SO ALIKE IN THE LONELY YEARN-
ING PATHOS OF THEIR HUMAN
CONDITION!



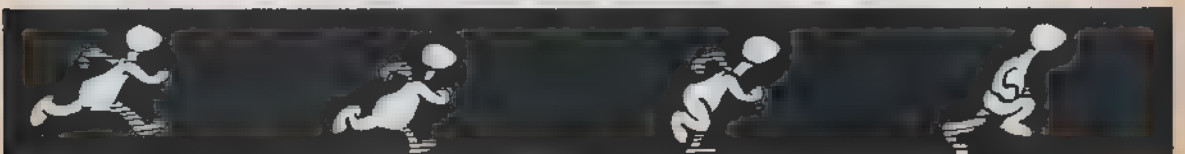
AS THEY
MEET, THE
BEGGAR
CLIMBS
INTO A
HOLE.



PAUSE, BRAVE WARRIOR,
AND RECOUNT FOR AN OLD
HOLY WANDERER, YOUR
TALES OF MIGHT!

THE SWORD-
MAN DOESN'T
HEAR, OR
PRETENDS
NOT TO.

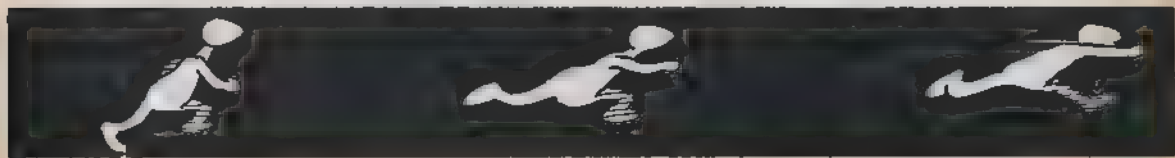
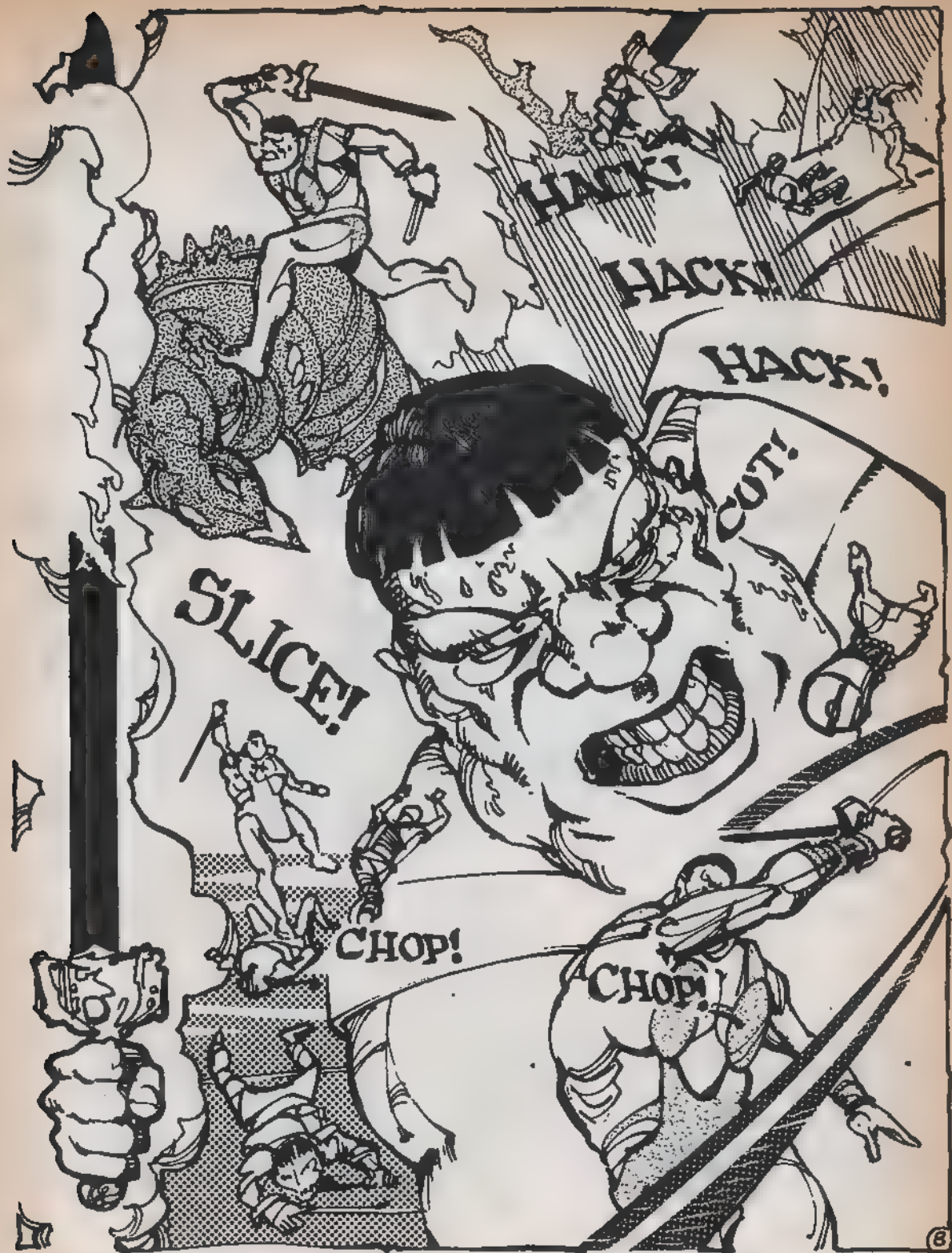
HALT A MOMENT,
PLEASE, OH VALIANT SOL-
DIER, A HUMBLE SAGE WOULD
LEARN FROM YOUR GREATNESS.



YOU ARE CURIOUS, ARE YOU NOT, OLD MAN, ABOUT THIS WONDROUS WEAPON HANGING EERILY SURROUNDED BY AN AURA OR HAZE OR SOME SIMILAR CHEAP TRICK ... YES?

YOU HONOR THIS UNWORTHY HUSK, NOBLE CHAMPION

BECAUSE YOU REMIND ME OF WHAT I SHALL ONE DAY BE, I'LL DEMONSTRATE THE FANTASTIC POWER OF THIS OTHERWORLDLY STEEL AND TELL YOU OF WHENCE IT CAME!



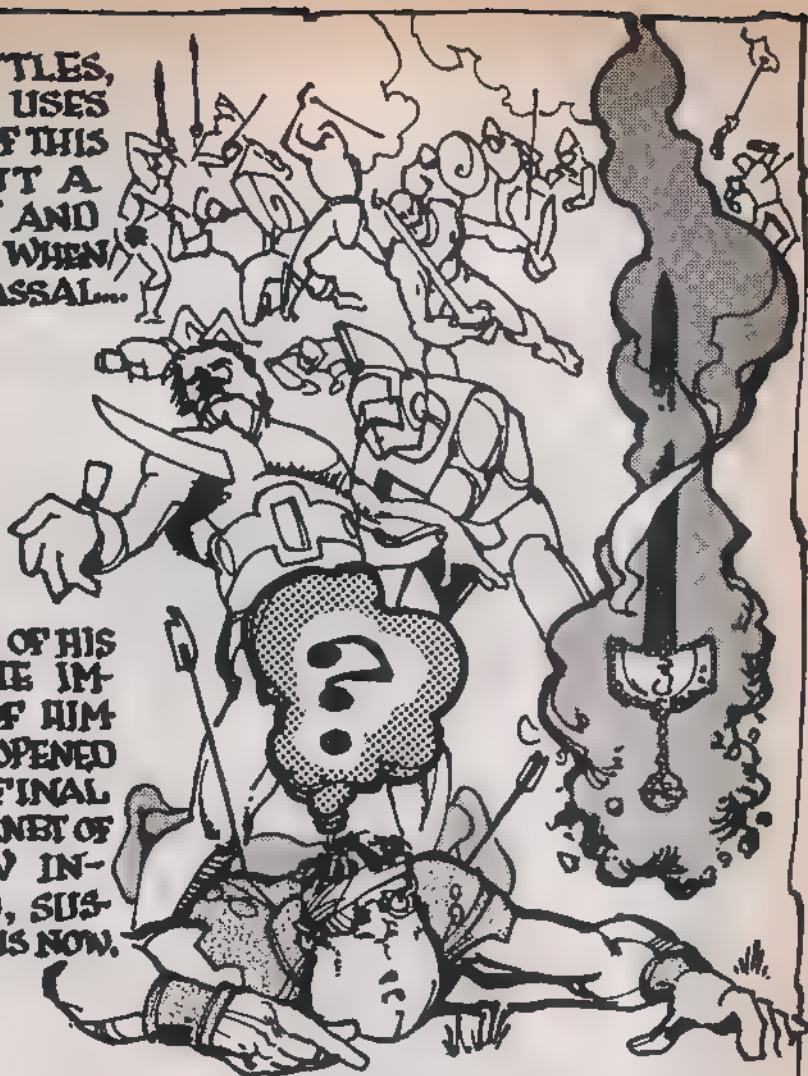
AS THE DUST SETTLES,
THE SWORDSMAN USES
THE REMAINDER OF THIS
PAGE TO RECOUNT A
TALE OF A VAST AND
TERRIBLE BATTLE WHEN
HE WAS BUT A VASSAL...

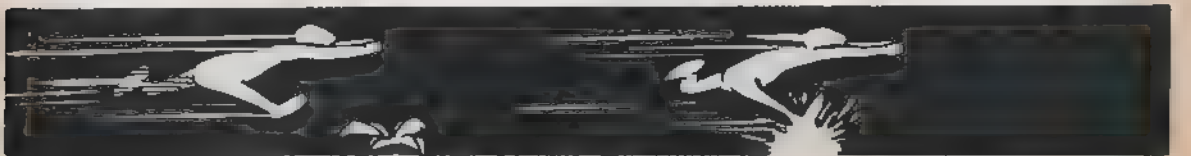
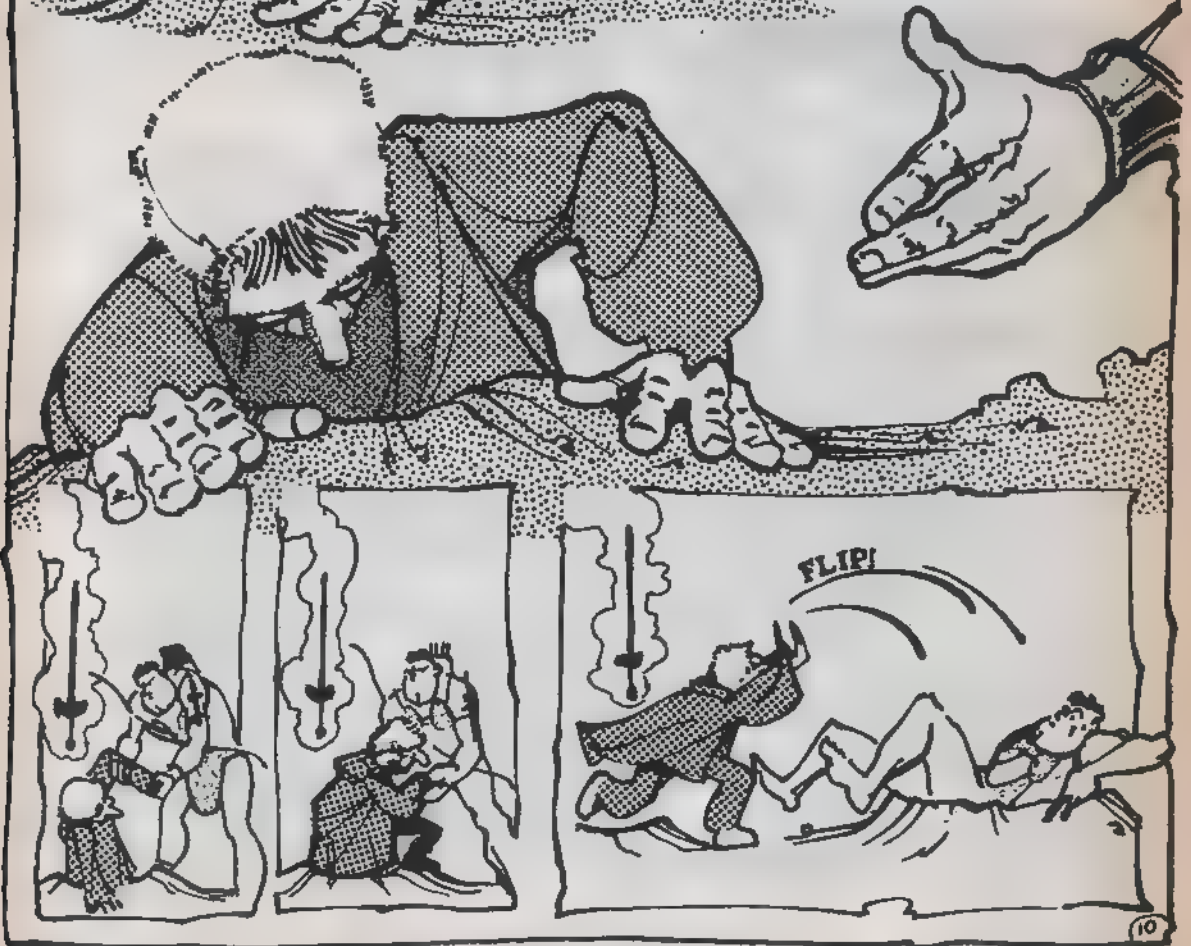


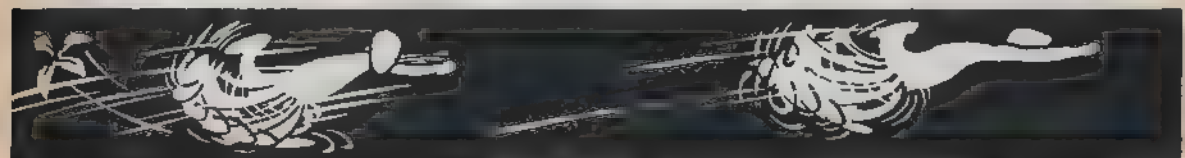
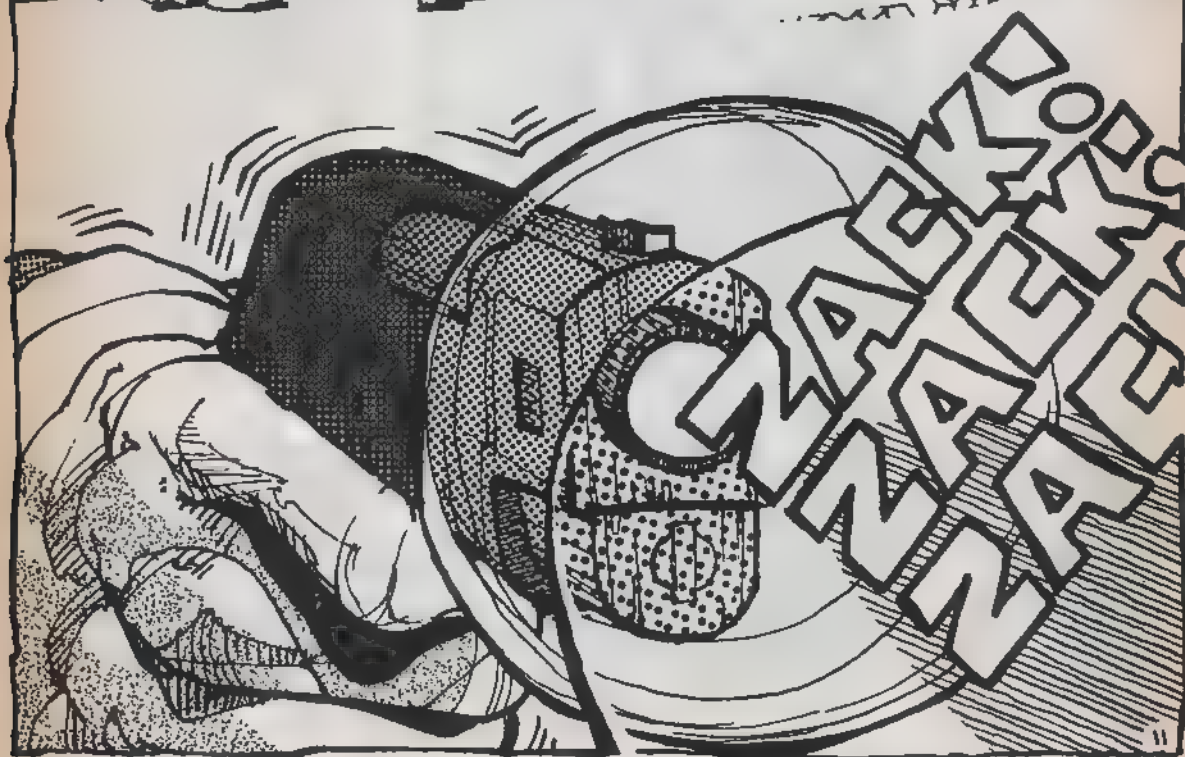
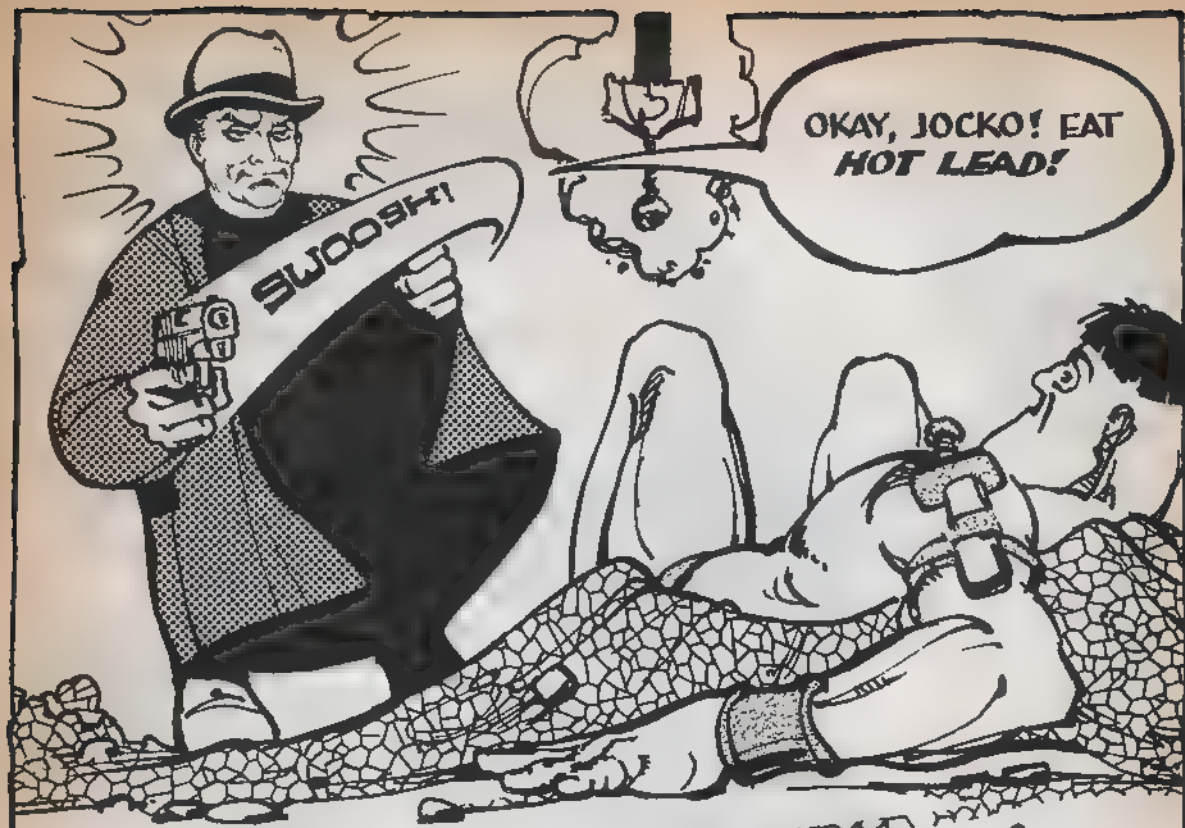
... OF THE DEATH OF HIS
LORD AND OF THE IM-
PENDING DEATH OF HIM-
SELF. BUT, AS HE OPENED
HIS EYES FOR A FINAL
LOOK AT THE PLANET OF
HIS LIFE, HE SAW IN-
STEAD THE SWORD, SUS-
PENDED JUST AS IT IS NOW.




MARSHALLING EVERY
OUNCE OF ENERGY
REMAINING, HE STOOD
ERECT AND GRASPED
THE HANDLE. THE REST,
HE SAID, IS OBVIOUSLY
HISTORY!









WE MAGICIANS
GET OFF DOING
JAMES CAGNEY
IMPRESSIONS!

FIN

DEDICATED TO
ARCHIE GOODWIN

SUBURBAN FISH

I never really realized how good I had it ... but things were really great back there in the old stream...



...what with all sorts of swinging, swimming upstream, and rock music going on!



But then one day I was caught...

GOTCHA!

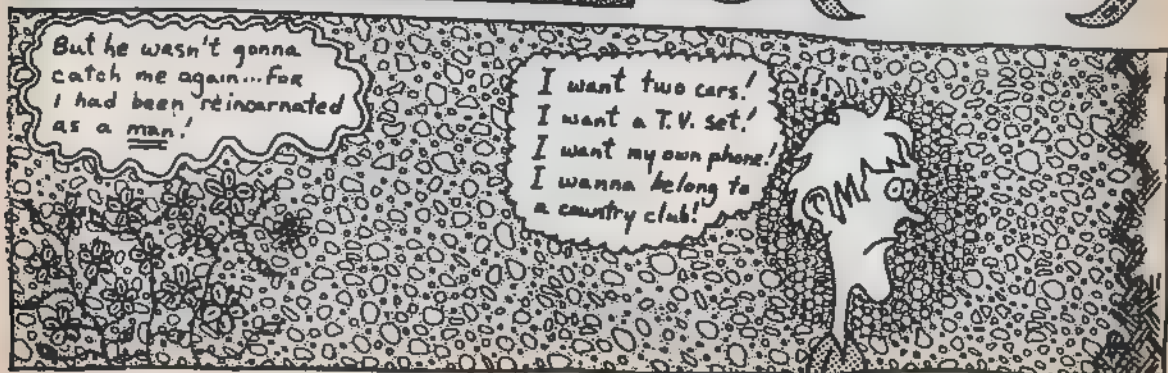
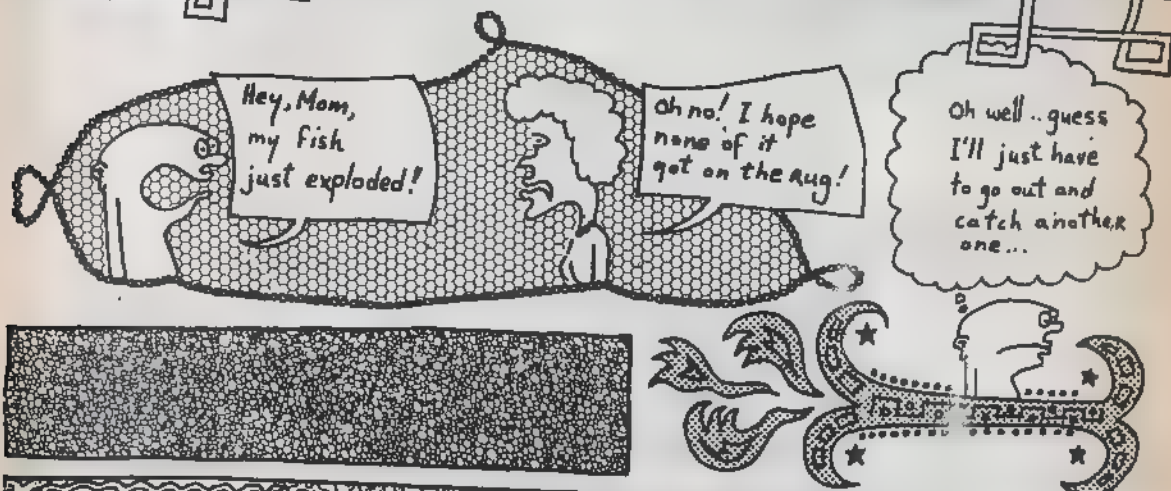
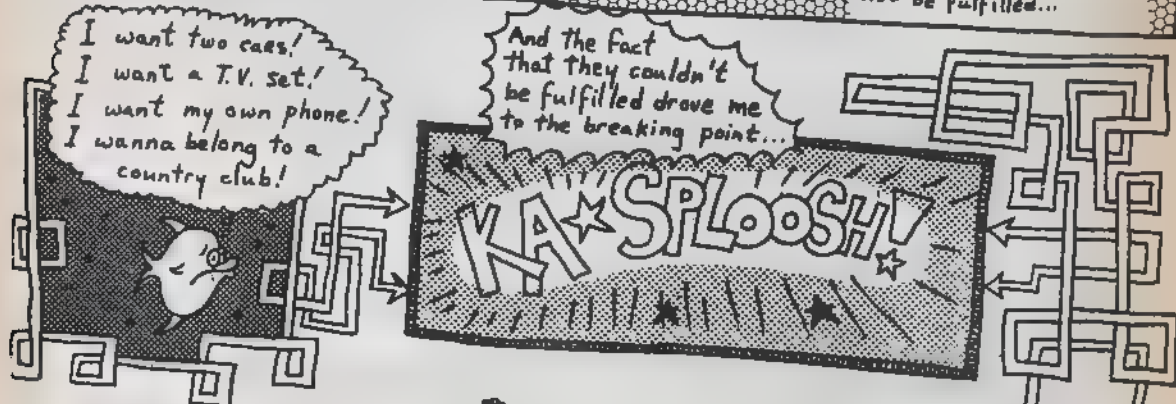
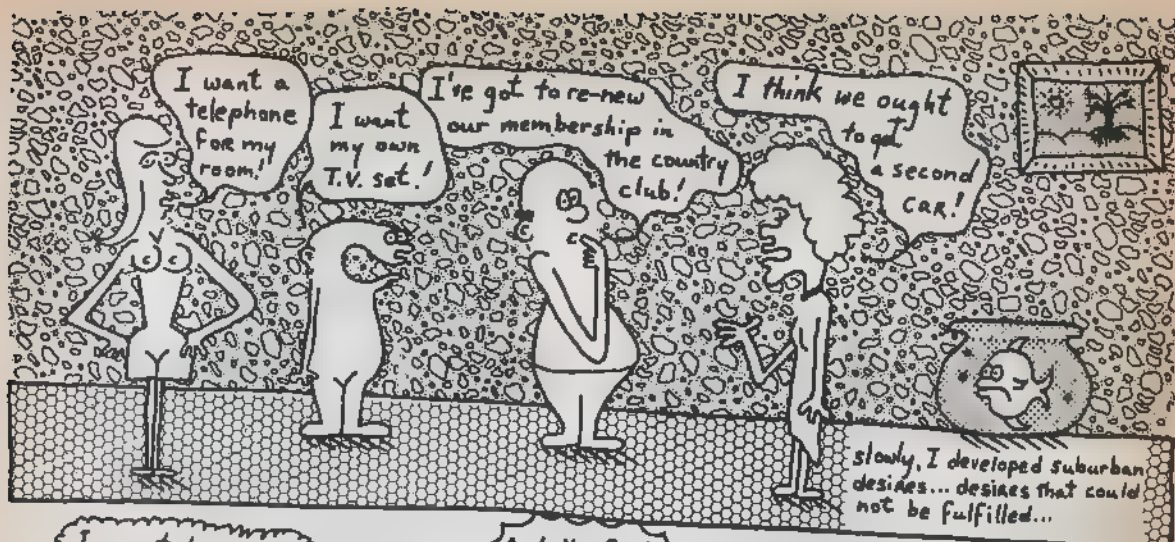


and moved into somebody's cramped little fishbowl in their stupid suburban home...

Hey Look, Mom!
I just got myself a new pet!

Junior, how many times do I gotta tell you not to track mud into the house!??





THE WAR HAD ENDED;
A WAR THAT TOPPLED
TWO GREAT EMPIRES
FOREVERMORE...

EMPIRES, WHICH IN
THEIR LAST DAYS
BROUGHT NEW
WEAPONS INTO PLAY.
WEAPONS NOT TO
KILL MEN. NO,
NOTHING SO PETTY...

...THEY CALLED IT
THE NOVA PRINCIPLE...

THE SMALLER KINGDOMS,
ALREADY WIDESPREAD,
BECAME MORE ISOLA-
TED AS STAR TRAVEL
CEASED. THERE WERE
NO MORE POWER
SOURCES LEFT...

THE ORGANIC STAR-
SHIPS SAILED. SHIPS
OF WOOD, OF CRYSTAL
... SHIPS OF STRANGE
DESIGN, GIFTS OF A
FORGOTTEN
BENEFACTOR...

IT WAS A VARIED
COLLECTION THAT
PLIED THE STARS
IN THAT BLACK
ARENA...

THERE WERE...



TRADERS...



MISSIONARIES...



MIME TROUPE...



...AND PIRATES.

OUR STORY CONCERNS ONE OF THE LATTER

© HOWARD
CHAYKIN 1974

THE SANCTUARY OF THE ST. BERYL
THE LEPER, LATE CATHEDRAL OF
THE PAPAL EMPIRE, NOW REGIS-
TERED AS A MONASTERY.

IT IS HERE
WE FIND...

CODY STARBUCK



BROTHER TOMÁS HAD KID-
NAPPED EVANGELINE BREED-
LOVE, BRIDE TO BE OF SIR
GIDEON PICKETT, PLANETARY
LORD OF KORUL.
OBJECT : RANSOM.



A GRAVE
ERROR. THE
BARON CON-
TACTED STAR-
BUCK. THE
PIRATES FEE
WAS NEARLY
TWICE THE
RANSOM...

BUT THERE WAS
THE FAMILY PRIDE
TO CONSIDER.

PORFIRO!

YO,
CAP'N?!

KEEP THE BROTHERS
AT BAY! SET YOUR
CHARGES AT 3
MINUTES--I'LL
GET OUT ON
MY OWN.

RIGHT,
CODY.

DOWN CORRIDORS
RANK WITH
INCENSE,
STARBUCK
BOUNDS
TOWARD
THE CABIN
OF BROTHER
TOMÁS...

...THERE TO FIND
THE PLUNDER!

CODY!!

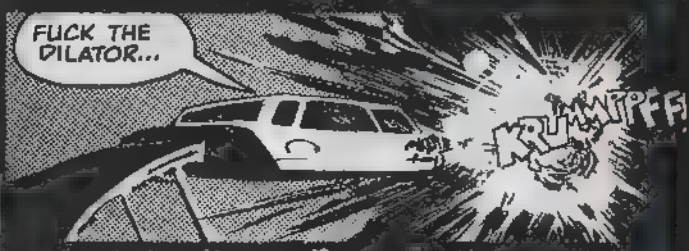
BACK OFF,
HEATHEN...



PRECIOUS SECONDS LATER...



FUCK THE PILATOR...



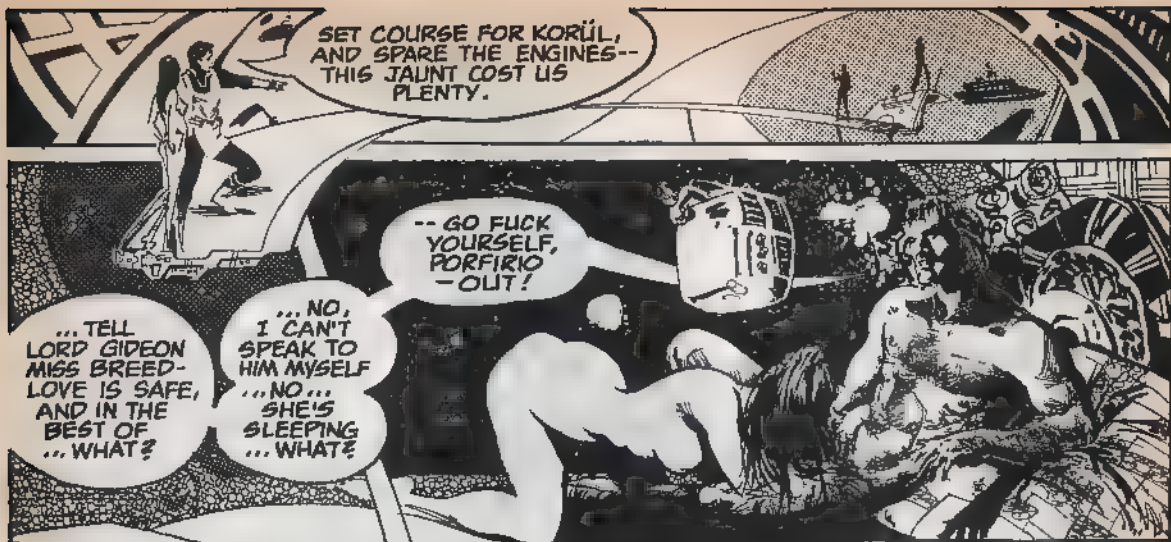
THE BROTHERS WON'T MISS THE DOOR, ANYWAY.



A SILENT GLOBE OF WHITE FIRE IS ALL THAT HERALDS THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOOD BROTHERS ON THAT OTHER SHORE...



...AND THE TINY SKIMMER, HELD IN THE DELICATE GRASP OF A TRACTOR BEAM, IS DRAWN TO SAFETY WITHIN THE LIMERICK RAKE.



SET COURSE FOR KORUL,
AND SPARE THE ENGINES--
THIS JAUNT COST US
PLENTY.

-- GO FUCK
YOURSELF,
PORFIRIO
-- OUT!

... TELL
LORD GIDEON
MISS BREED-
LOVE IS SAFE,
AND IN THE
BEST OF
... WHAT?

... NO,
I CAN'T
SPEAK TO
HIM MYSELF
... NO ...
SHE'S
SLEEPING
... WHATE



SOMEWHAT LATER A FLOATER
GLIDES DOWN THRU THE NIGHT
SKY OF THE CAPITOL OF KORUL...



... AND IN THE
HALLS OF LORD
GIDEON
PICKETT...

I CAN'T
THANK YOU
ENOUGH,
CODY. THESE
CHARACTERS'LL
THINK TWICE
NEXT TIME.

WELL... I'M
TOLD YOU'RE
ENTERTAINING
AN EMBASSADOR,
SO I'LL BE
ON MY WAY...



NOT AT ALL!
JOIN US FOR A
DRINK. HE SAYS
HE'S AN OLD
COMRADE OF
YOURS AND..

... HERE
HE IS
NOW!



WELL, CODY,
IT'S BEEN QUITE
SOME TIME,
HASN'T IT?



TRACHMANN!!

TRACHMANN... YES. FOUR.. NO,
FIVE YEARS SINCE THE PALADINE
... THE PALADINE.

... CAPTAIN
ELON CODY
STARBUCK,
COMMANDER
OF 'MARAUDER-
WING' OF
RENEGADE
STARFLEET,
EN ROUTE TO
AURIEL, HUB
WORLD OF
THE PALADINE...

... THE PALADINE...

... ABOARD RENEGADE
STARSHIP 'DIEGO ROBLES'
CAPTAIN WILHELM TRACHMANN
... HAVING TRANSMITTED THE
WARP COORDINATES OF
AURIEL TO A PAPAL STAR-
FLEET SOME LIGHT YEARS
DISTANT... CONTEMPLATED
HIS REWARD FOR BETRAYAL...

... THE BLOOD
BATH THAT
RESULTED
PUSHED THE
RENEGADES FAR
BACK TO THEIR
INNER WORLDS
... IT WAS
ASSUMED THAT
THE PAPISTS HAD
FOLLOWED
'MARAUDERWING'
TO THE
PALADINE.

STARBUCK
WAS ACCUSED
OF NEGLIGENCE
... ACQUITTED ON
LACK OF EVIDENCE
... HIS CAREER,
HOWEVER, WAS
OVER... AND HERE
BEFORE HIM
STOOD THE
MAN RESPONSIB-
LE... HIS
ACCUSER.

DAMN RIGHT, IT'S
BEEN SOME TIME!
YOUR ASS IS MINE,
TRACHMANN!

NO!
I WILL NOT
HAVE
IT!

ARE YOU MAD?!
THIS MAN IS AN
AMBASSADOR...
SHALL I FIGHT
A WAR WITH HIS
EMPLOYERS TO
SATISFY SOME
PERSONAL FEUD?

ENOUGH! SIGNORE
TRACHMANN CAME
IN PEACE SEEKING
TRADE, THE FOLK
HE REPRESENTS
ARE REPULSIVE BY
OUR STANDARDS,
SO THEY HAVE
HUMAN EMISSARIES.

THEY HAVE AN ABUNDANCE
OF RAW APTORAL CRYSTALS...

...CRYSTALS TO
POWER MY LONG-
ROTTING STAR-
FLEET.



FURTHERMORE,
IN THE SPIRIT OF
GOODWILL, HE HAS
BROUGHT ME THIS...

AN ALTER OF
THE PENTOS CHURCH,
THE FINEST EXAMPLE
I'VE EVERY SEEN.
OBSERVE THE
FILIGREE, THE
WORKMANSH--

YOU'VE MADE YOUR
POINT, GIDEON.

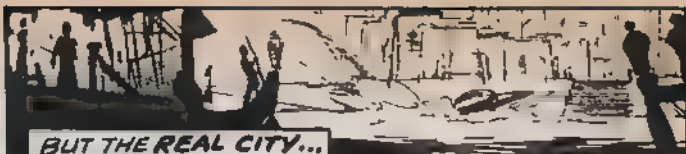
STARBUCK SOUGHT NO
TROUBLE FOR LORD GIDEON.
THE BARON WAS A GOOD
AND JUST MAN. AND...
NOW THAT HE KNEW
TRACHMANN'S WHERE-
ABOUTS, HIS DAY WOULD
COME. STILL...

I WON'T
MEDDLE IN
YOUR AFFAIRS,
GIDEON. THEY'RE
YOUR PROBLEMS.
DEPOSIT MY FEE
UNDER THE USUAL
PSEUDONYM...

BUT AS LONG
AS THIS MAN
IS IN YOUR HOME
YOU'D DO WELL
TO SLEEP WITH
ONE EYE OPEN.

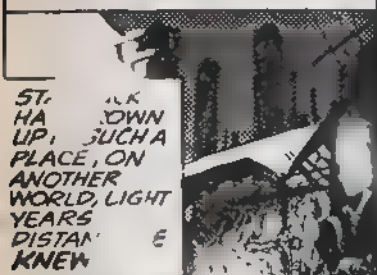
GOOD
EVENING,
MILADY.

NEW ARAGON, A CITY OF VILLAS, MANSIONS AND MONUMENTS, HAD BEEN BUILT SINCE THE WAR, FINANCED BY BLACK MARKETEERING. THIS WAS THE CITY ONE SEES IN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE RELEASES.



BUT THE REAL CITY...

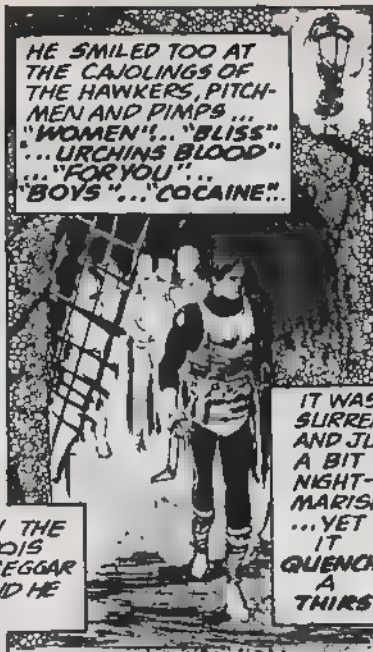
THE REAL CITY LAY IN THE SHADOW OF THOSE SPIRES, ITS STREETS ALIVE WITH THE SENSATION THAT MAKES A CITY A CITY.



ST. JACK
HA TOWN
UP, SUCH A
PLACE, ON
ANOTHER
WORLD, LIGHT
YEARS
DISTANCE
HE KNEW

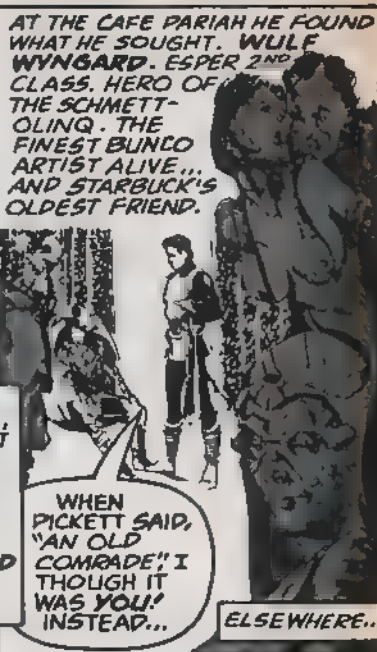


HE KNEW THE EASY PATOIS OF THE BEGGAR GIRLS, AND HE SMILED.



HE SMILED TOO AT THE CAJOLINGS OF THE HAWKERS, PITCHMEN AND PIMPS... "WOMEN"... "BLISS"... "URCHINS BLOOD"... "FOR YOU"... "BOYS"... "COCAINE"...

IT WAS SURREAL, AND JUST A BIT NIGHT-MARISH... YET IT QUENCHED A THIRST.



AT THE CAFE PARIAS HE FOUND WHAT HE SOUGHT. WULF WYNGARD. ESPER 2ND CLASS. HERO OF THE SCHMETT-OLING. THE FINEST BUNCO ARTIST ALIVE... AND STARBUCK'S OLDEST FRIEND.

WHEN PICKETT SAID, "AN OLD COMRADE," I THOUGHT IT WAS YOU! INSTEAD...

ELSEWHERE...



CHECK.

DAMN.

IN THE PARLOR OF LORD PICKETT, THE NEAR-SILENT JOINING OF HIDDEN RELAYS DOES NOT DISTURB A QUIET GAME OF CHESS.

THE IDEA OF MATTER TRANSMISSION HAD BEEN DISCARDED BY BOTH EMPIRES AS PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE...

HOWEVER... A RACE THAT FOUND IT PHYSICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO TRAVEL IN SPACE...

...MIGHT BE FORCED BY ITS OWN NEEDS FOR EXPANSION TO GURMOUNT THAT IMPOSSIBILITY.



FUCKING MACHINE... LET'S SEE...



AH! QUEEN TO KING'S PAW-



CHECKMATE...

... AND BEFORE HIS BATTLE
"AXE OF A WIFE IS COLD IN
THE GROUND, IB:KK DECLARES
POLYGAMY LEGAL. HE
CALLS ME...

... SAYS, "WULF,
YOU DA BEST EXPLA
IN DA BIZNESS. I
WANT A HAREM...

"... DA BEST YOU
CAN BUY." SO HERE
WE ARE. "CORDELIA"
THE FINEST LIGHTER
-THAN-AIR BORDELLO
ON KORUL.

hmmmm...

... NOW IF YOU WOULD LOOK
THIS WAY... I HAVE A SURPRISE.
AT GREAT RISK, I BRING YOU
... THE CLONEDROIDS!

I BROUGHT
YOU ALONG CAUSE
YOU'RE SUCH A
PURITAN. YOU
OUGHT TO OPEN
YOURSELF A BIT.

CLONEDROIDS.

THEY VAMPED AND CAPERED LIKE A CHORUS LINE
CONCEIVED IN SOME DISQUIETING UNIVERSAL
FANTASY... CREATED AND NURTURED IN PODS
OF GOLD... EACH A FACSIMILE OF AN ALMOST
FORGOTTEN DREAM IMAGE...

LILITH

HARLEQUIN

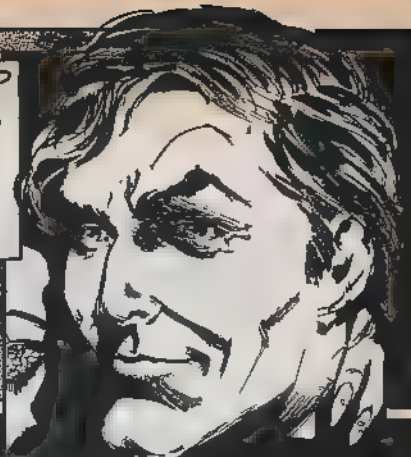
SISTER
MERCY

PRIMEVA

"CLONEDROIDS - REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF HOMUNCULI, LTD"...

HOMUNCULI, LTD HAD BEEN A PAPAL CARTEL, A MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO THE CATHOLIC REGIME. IT WAS PUBLICLY ASSUMED THAT THE COMPANY HAD DIED IN THE ASHES OF THE EMPIRE. BUT THERE WERE THE PRODUCTS, OBVIOUSLY NEW...

...10 YEARS AGO HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN DISGUSTED, BUT HE HAD CHANGED, AS HAD MANKIND. IT WAS A NEW WORLD, WITH NO ROOM FOR IDEOLOGY.



"PERHAPS WYNGARD IS RIGHT," HE MUSES.

MEANWHILE...

...A SILENT FIGURE CREPT ABOARD THE AIR SHIP...

WELL, LITTLE FELLA -- MADE UP YOUR MIND?

hmmmm... YES, I'LL TAKE THEM ALL.



ALL OF THEM? ARE YOU SERIOUS?

I ASSURE YOU, MADAM...



MY CLIENT HAS THE RESOUR...
...I...I...

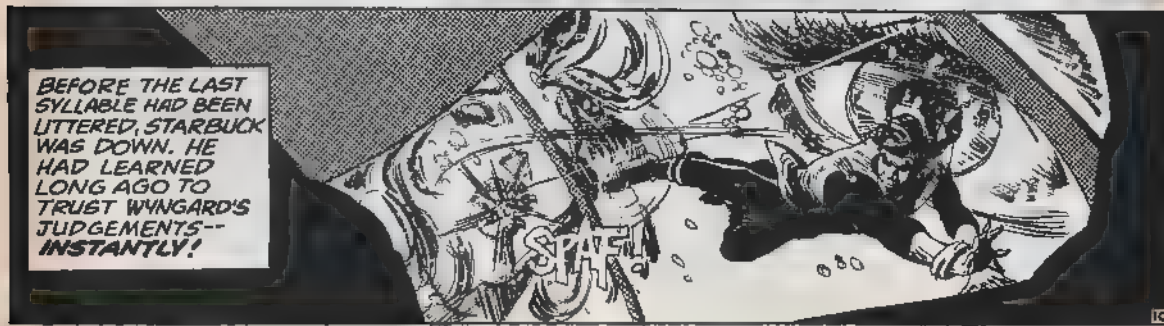


ESPERS HAD NOT FARED WELL AFTER THE WAR. EAGER TO FIND A SCAPEGOAT, THE STAR KINGS HAD CHOSEN THE TELEPATHS. THE POGROMS, THE PUBLIC HANGINGS... THESE WERE BITTER MEMORIES. THUS, WYNGARD KEPT THIS TALENT TO HIMSELF. IF HE HADN'T, PERHAPS THE ASSASSIN MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN SO OBVIOUS.

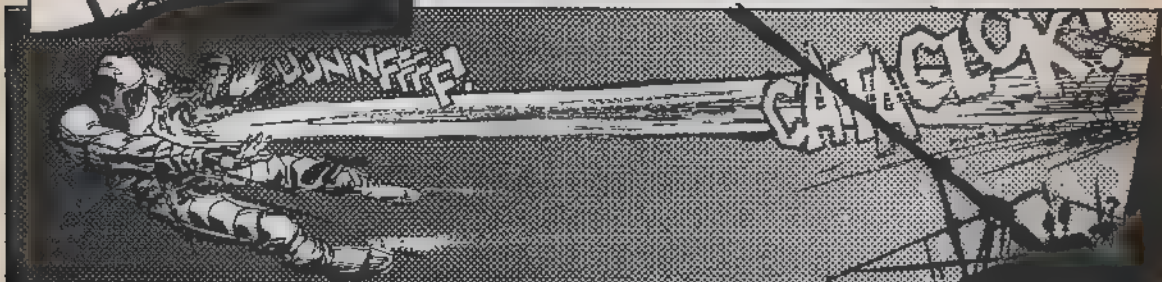
STARBUCK!
HIT THE FLOOR!



BEFORE THE LAST SYLLABLE HAD BEEN LITTERED, STARBUCK WAS DOWN. HE HAD LEARNED LONG AGO TO TRUST WYNGARD'S JUDGEMENTS-- INSTANTLY!



A VALET ROBOT ROLLED BY, BLISSFULLY UNAWARE OF THE SITUATION...



...THE ASSASIN, TWO BROKEN RIBS UNDER HIS TUNIC, TURNED AND GRABBED THE RAIL OF HIS KAYAK...



...TOO LATE.



WHO SENT YOU?

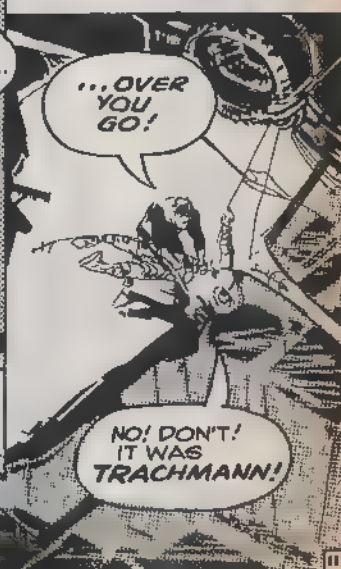
HOOBNUK K K



LOUDER! WHO SENT YOU?

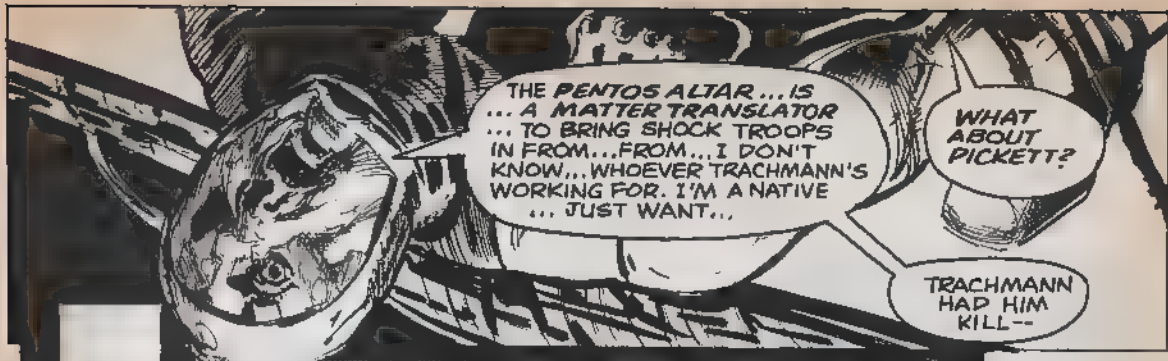


ALRIGHT, YOU YELLOW MOTHERFUCKER...



...OVER YOU GO!

NO! DON'T! IT WAS TRACHMANN!



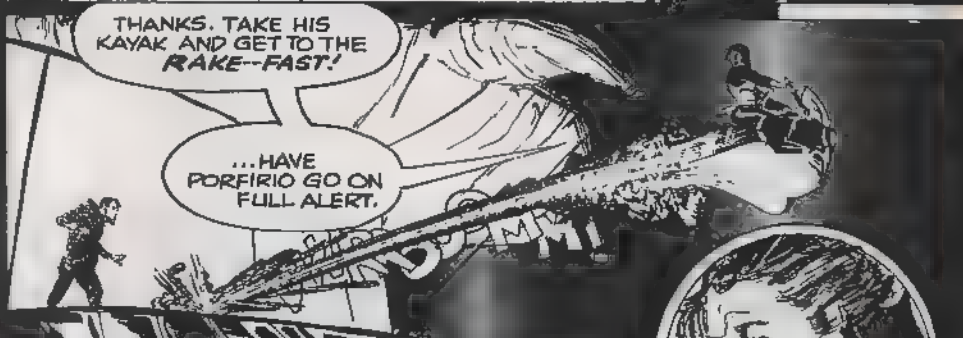
THE PENTOS ALTAR... IS
... A MATTER TRANSLATOR
... TO BRING SHOCK TROOPS
IN FROM... FROM... I DON'T
KNOW... WHOEVER TRACHMANN'S
WORKING FOR. I'M A NATIVE
... JUST WANT...

WHAT
ABOUT
PICKETT?

TRACHMANN
HAD HIM
KILL--



I PEEPED
THE WHOLE THING.
-- YOU'LL NEED
THESE.



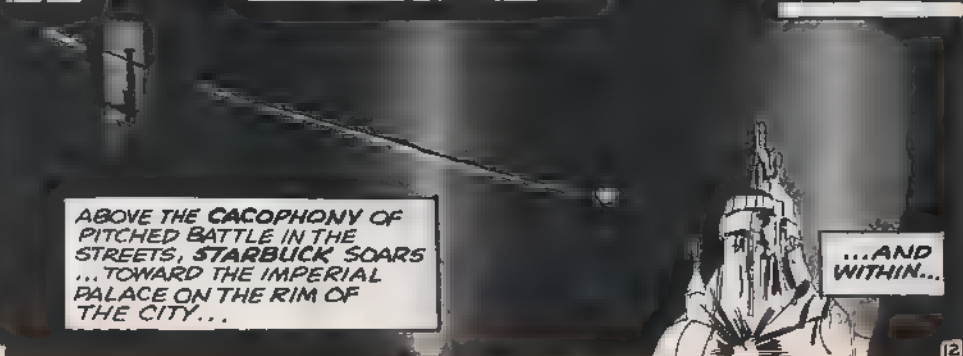
THANKS. TAKE HIS
KAYAK AND GET TO THE
RAKE--FAST!

... HAVE
PORFIRIO GO ON
FULL ALERT.



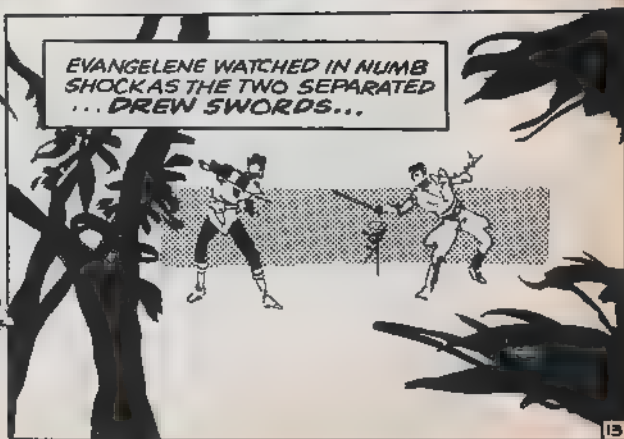
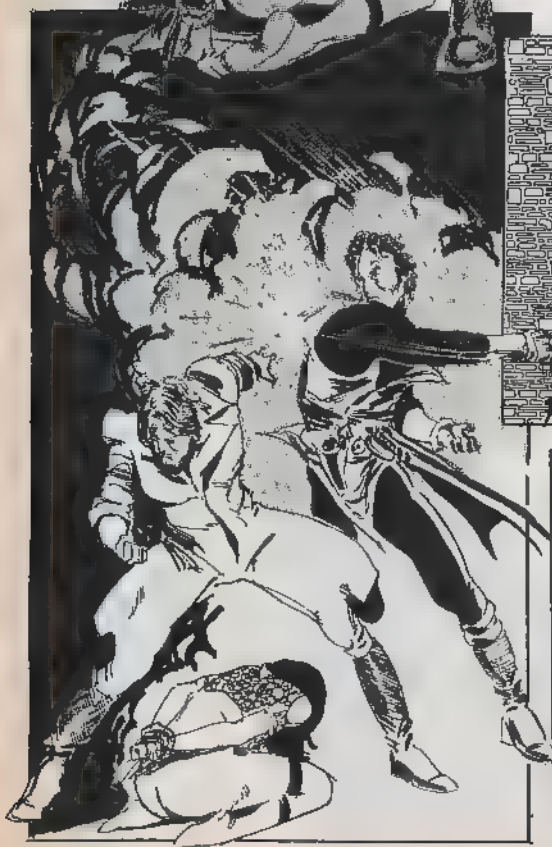
MOMENTS LATER,
LEVELING OFF
FROM A MILE-
LONG POWER
DIVE-- STARBUCK
IS MUTE WITNESS
TO MASSACRE...

... AS THE STREETS
BELOW ARE GUTTED
BY PLASMA FIRE!



ABOVE THE CACOPHONY OF
PITCHED BATTLE IN THE
STREETS, STARBUCK SOARS
... TOWARD THE IMPERIAL
PALACE ON THE RIM OF
THE CITY...

... AND
WITHIN...



AND ENGAGED!

STARBUCK FOUGHT IN
COLD FURY, HIS MIND
FILLED WITH MEMORIES
OF THE TREACHERY OF
HIS OPPONENT...

AN
OPPONENT
EQUAL TO
HIM AT
SWORD-
PLAY...

...AND WHOSE CUNNING
MIGHT SURPASS HIS OWN!

WHY DO WE
FIGHT,
STARBUCK?

WE ARE THE
SAME -- YOU
-- AND I!

CUTTHROATS -- KILLERS!
COME -- JOIN ME! THERE'S
A FORTUNE IN
SLAUGHTER!

ALIKE, EH?
WELL THEN GET
TO YOUR FEET--
AND BE SKEWERED
BY A BROTHER
IN BLOOD.

TRACHMANN BELIEVED
THAT DISCRETION WAS
THE BETTER PART OF
VALOR. HE PREPARED
FOR EMERGENCIES...

THEREFORE, HE
FIENTED WITH
HIS BLADE,
SAID...

ROCINANTE!

... AND PROMPTLY WHEELED AND RAN
TOWARD THE NOW OPERATING TRANS-
MITTER, ACTIVATED BY THE PREPRO-
GRAMMED WORD!

WHAT
IS
THIS?!

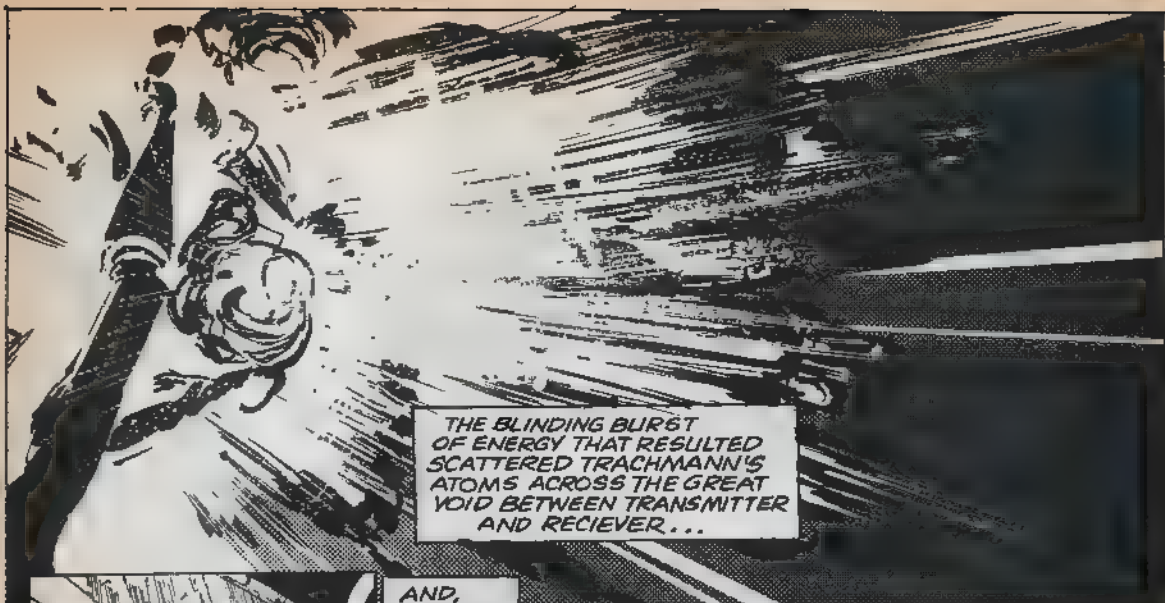
A MISS...PERHAPS.

SO!

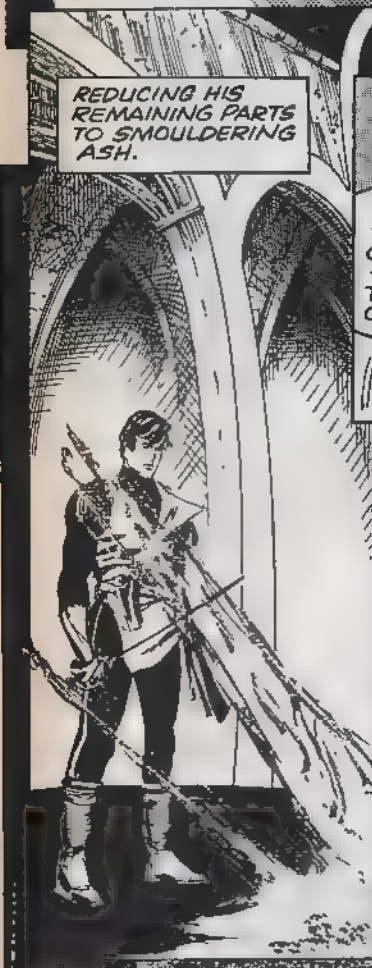
SPARK!

BUT BY THE VERY
NATURE OF ITS
PURPOSE, A MATTER
TRANSMITTER IS A
MOST DELICATE
DEVICE.

AND ANY
UPSET OF
ITS
FRAGILE
CIRCUITRY
MIGHT
VERY WELL
CAUSE...




THE BLINDING BURST
OF ENERGY THAT RESULTED
SCATTERED TRACHMANN'S
ATOMS ACROSS THE GREAT
VOID BETWEEN TRANSMITTER
AND RECIEVER...



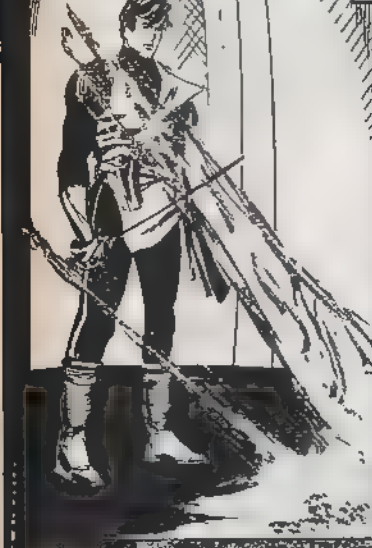
REDUCING HIS
REMAINING PARTS
TO SMOULDERING
ASH.

AND,
MOMENTS
LATER...

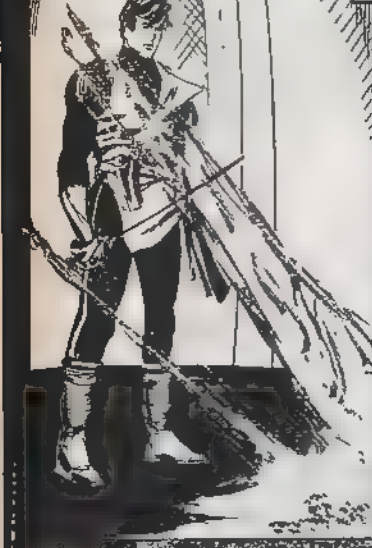


'VANGE'
YOU'D BEST
COME WITH ME
--THEY'RE
TEARING THE
CITY APART.

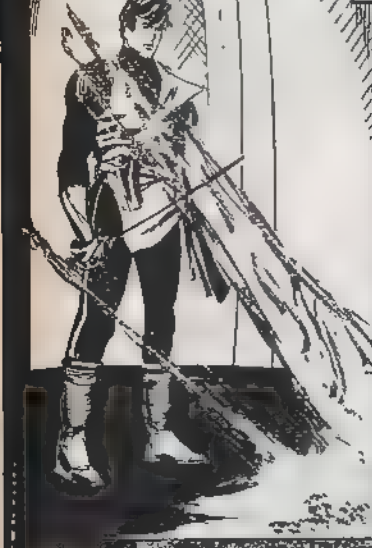
BUT-



THERE'S NO-
THING I CAN DO.
I CAN'T FIGHT
A WAR. NOT
NOW.



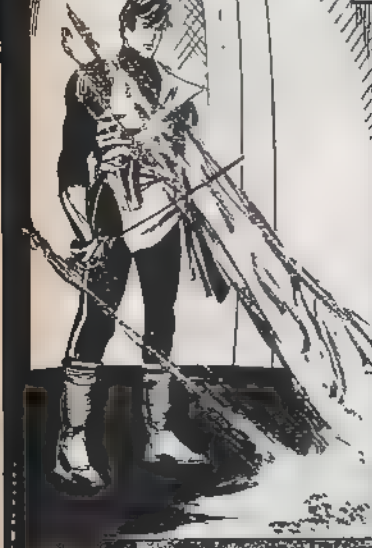
...THERE IS A GREAT
FLASH AND DARKNESS...



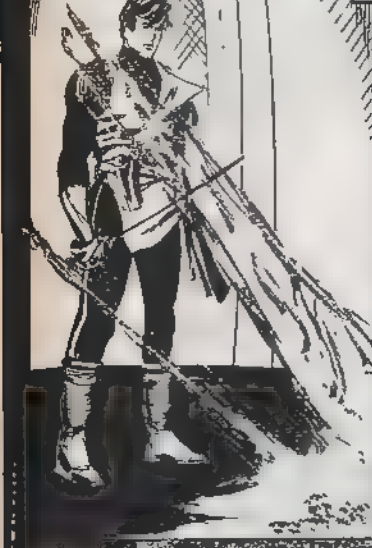
THEY'VE
TAKEN THE POWER
STATION. IT'S
ALL OVER.



COME.



THUS FELL NEW ARAGON,
JEWEL OF KORUL... NOW A
DARK SPRAW OF BLACK
TOWERS LIT ONLY BY BURSTS
OF FIRE...



.... AND THE SKY SWALLOWED
THE LITTLE SHIP AS IT SOARED
TO ITS DESTINATION....

END
PART
ONE-



WELL JOHNNY, TONIGHT YOU'RE IN FOR A REAL TREAT! YOUR FOLKS ARE BUSY RIGHT NOW, SO YOUR **UNCLE MORT** IS GONNA TELL YOU YOUR **BED-TIME** STORY TONIGHT!

NOW I'M NOT GOING TO HAND YOU ANY **DRIBBLE** ABOUT THREE **BEARS** OR SOME **BROAD** IN A **RED HOOD**! NO, TONIGHT YOU GET A STORY WITH SOME **MEAT** ON IT!

THIS HERE **TALE**'S ONE NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW! I GUESS IF YOU NEED A **TITLE** FOR IT, YOU MAY AS WELL CALL IT...

THE *BIRTH* OF DEATH!

THIS YARN DON'T TAKE PLACE ON EARTH, BUT THEN AGAIN, IT DON'T TAKE PLACE IN NO IMAGINARY WORLD EITHER! THIS AIN'T NO FAIRY TALE!



THIS STORY DON'T TAKE PLACE IN OUR TIME, EITHER! NOR DID IT HAPPEN IN THE PAST OR FUTURE! ALL I'M GOING TO TELL YOU WENT ON BEFORE TIME EVER BEGAN, OR AFTER IT ENDED... DEPENDING HOW YOU LOOK AT IT!



FACT IS, THERE WEREN'T NO PEOPLE THEN, NOR EARTH OR SUN! THERE WAS JUST A LOT OF SPACE FULL OF STARS AND PLANETS THAT HAVE LONG SINCE DISAPPEARED!

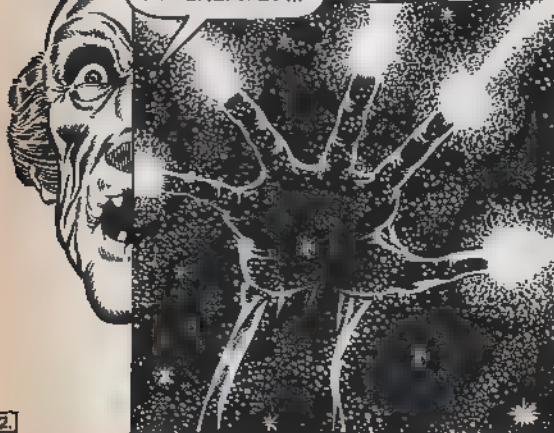


BACK THEN THE ONLY THING LIVING WAS A BEING KNOWN AS GOD. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN AROUND, OR SO HE CLAIMS!

BUT EVEN GOD CAN GET LONELY. YOU CAN'T TALK TO EMPTY SPACE, OR PLANETS, OR STARS... AT LEAST BACK THEN YOU COULDN'T!



SO GOD REACHED OUT AND USED SOME OF THAT VAST POWER HE'S GOT STORED UP AND DID SOMETHING REALLY SPECTACULAR! OUT OF THE NOTHINGNESS OF SPACE HE CREATED...



...THE ANGELS! YOU AIN'T NEVER SEEN NOTHING LIKE THEM, ALL SHINY AND BRIGHT! THEY WAS GOD'S BEST EFFORT! HE'D NEVER CREATE ANYTHING SO PERFECT AS THEM EVER AGAIN! WELL... THEY WAS ALMOST ALL PERFECT!



LIKE WITH **MOST** THINGS THERE'S ALWAYS A **ROTTEN** ONE IN THE BUNCH! AMONG THE **ANGELS**, THE **BAD** ONE WAS **LUCIFER**! HE WOULDN'T GO ALONG WITH THINGS, SO HE WENT AND STARTED HIS OWN... HOW DO YOU SAY... **LIFE STYLE**? THAT'S HOW **EVIL** BEGAN!



MEANWHILE, GOD WAS KIND-OF TOO **BUSY** TO PAY MUCH **MIND** TO **LUCIFER'S** WAYS! HE'D REALLY GOTTEN INTO **CREATING** BEINGS, SO HE WAS, FOR THE MOMENT, TIED UP WITH MAKING THE EARTH **LIVABLE** FOR...



...THE NEXT **BATCH** OF BEINGS HE WAS FIXING TO GIVE LIFE TO! GOD FIGURED HE'D CALL THEM **HUMANS**! THEY CALLED THEMSELVES **ADAM** AND **EVE**!



WELL, **UNLIKE** THE **ANGELS**, THESE **HUMANS** COULD **MULTIPLY**! SO, BEFORE YOU KNOW WHAT'S **HAPPENING**, THERE'S **HUNDREDS** OF THESE **CRITTERS** **RUNNING** AROUND! THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO CAUSE NO **TROUBLE**, SO GOD LET THEM BE!



NO, **TROUBLE** WAS GOING TO COME FROM ELSEWHERE! THE **TROUBLE** WOULD BE **LUCIFER**! THAT **RENEGADE** **ANGEL** FIGURED HE'D LIVED IN GOD'S **SHADOW** LONG ENOUGH! IT WAS TIME FOR **LUCIFER** TO **TAKE OVER**!



'COURSE, IT WAS **FATED** THAT **LUCIFER** WOULD **FALL**! **GOD** **CREATED** THIS **DEVIL**, SO **GOD** WAS QUITE **NATURALLY** HIS **SUPERIOR**! **STILL**, **LUCIFER** PUT UP A **BATTLE** THAT **ROCKED** THE **UNIVERSE**! **IN** THE **END**, **LUCIFER** WOULD BE **CAST** FROM THE **HEAVENS**, BUT HE WOULD HAVE LEFT HIS **MARK**! THE **WORD** WOULD **SPREAD** THAT AN **ANGEL** HAD **DEFIED** **GOD** AND **YET LIVED**! THIS **TALE** WOULD **EVENTUALLY** **REACH** EVEN THE **HUMANS**!



OH! **LUCIFER** HAD **STARTED** THE **STORY** **AMONG** THE **HUMANS** THAT, IF ONE **ATE** THE **FRUIT** OF THE **FORBIDDEN** **TREE**, ONE WOULD **BECOME** AS **GOD**! SO **WHILE** **GOD** WAS **BUSY** **FIXING** UP THE **SHAMBLES** HIS **FIGHT** WITH THE **DEVIL** HAD **MADE** OF THE **UNIVERSE**, A **GROUP** OF **HUMANS** DID A **BIT** OF **FORBIDDEN** **SAMPLING**!



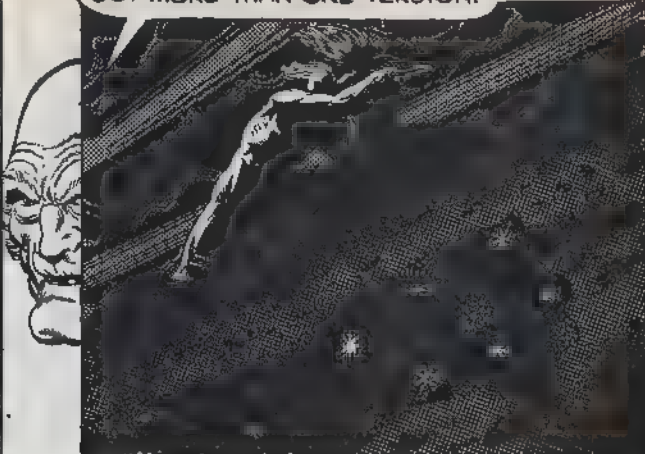
WELL, THEY **CHANGED**, **ALL** **RIGHT**! **SOME** OF THEM **GAINED** **VAST** **POWERS**, **SOME** **NOT** **SO** **VAST**! **BUT** **WHAT** **DID** **HAPPEN** **WAS** **THAT** **MOST** OF THEM **LOST** THEIR **HUMANITY** AND **ALL** OF THEM **LOST** THEIR **SANITY**! SO **EMERGED** THE **THIRD** **RACE** OF **BEINGS**... THE **MAD** **IMMORTALS**!



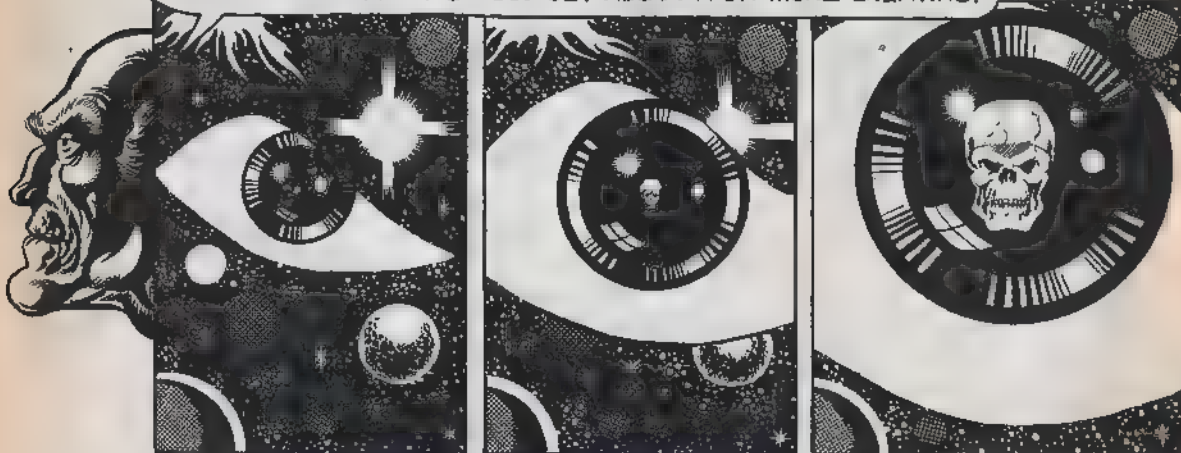
IT DIDN'T TAKE GOD LONG TO FIND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED! HE WAS **FURIOUS!** IT HAD BEEN **ADAM'S** JOB TO KEEP THE HUMANS IN LINE! HE'D BEEN **RESPONSIBLE**, AND HE'D **BLOWN IT!**



SO, MAN WAS **DRIVEN** FROM **PARADISE**, OUT INTO THE **WILDERNESS!** YOU MAY HAVE HEARD THIS TALE TOLD **DIFFERENTLY** BEFORE, SON! WELL, LIKE MOST **GOOD** STORIES, THIS ONE'S GOT MORE THAN ONE **VERSION!**



WELL, TO GET BACK TO **GOD!** HE FIGURED HE'D BEEN **WRONGED!** IN ALL THE UNIVERSE THERE AIN'T NOTHING MORE **FEARSOME** TO BEHOLD THAN A **WRATHFUL** **GOD!** THIS HAD BECOME A TIME OF **GRIEVOUS** **CRIMES!** THUS IT BECAME A TIME FOR **AWESOME** **PUNISHMENT!** SO **GOD** SET ABOUT A BIT MORE **CREATING!**



NO ANGELS OR HUMANS DID **GOD** MAKE **THIS** TIME! **GOD** WAS COOKING UP SOMETHING **REALLY** **DIFFERENT!** **THIS** WAS GOING TO BE A **ONE-OF-A-KIND** **CREATION!** **THIS** ONE WOULD BE **DARK** AND **POWERFUL!** **THIS** ONE WOULD **STRIKE** **FEAR** INTO THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO WOULD **CHALLENGE** **GOD'S** **WILL!** **THIS** ONE WOULD BE THE **PUNISHER...** THE **EXECUTIONER!**



Death!

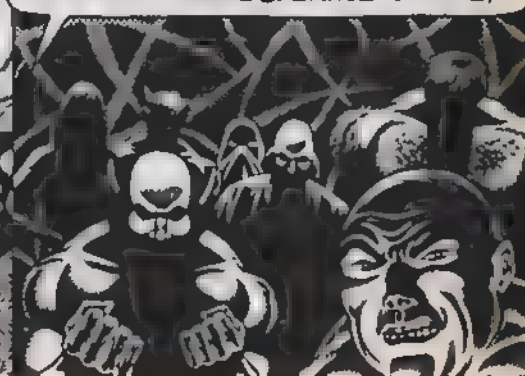
DEATH'S FIRST JOB, OF COURSE, WAS GETTING RID OF THE IMMORTALS! HE SWOOPED DOWN ON THEM LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF HELL! HE HUNTED THEM DOWN LIKE WILD ANIMALS, AND WHENEVER HE FOUND THEM



“DEATH LIVED UP TO HIS NAME!”



FINALLY, DEATH'S REIGN OF TERROR GOT SO BAD THAT THE SEVEN MOST POWERFUL IMMORTALS HAD TO BAND TOGETHER TO SURVIVE! ALL OTHER IMMORTALS DIED THE REAL DEATH, BUT THE SEVEN LIVE ON TO THIS VERY DAY, STILL DEFYING DEATH! BUT HE'LL GET THEM SOMEDAY! HE MUST! THE IMMORTALS' VERY EXISTENCE UPSETS THE COSMIC BALANCE OF LIFE!



BUT THIS AIN'T THE END TO DEATH'S STORY! GOD FIGURED THE IMMORTALS' CRIME WAS ALSO MANKIND'S CRIME! THE HUMANS WOULD HAVE TO BE CENSURED! THIS WOULD BE DEATH'S SECONDARY RESPONSIBILITY!



NO LONGER WOULD HUMANS LEAD THE EASY LIFE THEY HAD IN PARADISE! THEY WOULD HAVE TO PROVE THEMSELVES TO GOD OR SUFFER DAMNATION! DEATH WAS GIVEN THE BOOK OF SOULS, WHICH IS KIND OF A SCHEDULE FOR MANKIND! EVERY SOUL WOULD GET A SPECIAL ALLOTMENT OF TIME TO SHOW ITS WORTH! DEATH'S JOB WAS TO COLLECT THOSE SOULS WHOSE TIME HAD RUN OUT!



SO THAT'S HOW IT'S BEEN EVER SINCE! DEATH'S BEEN COLLECTING AND HUNTING AND WAITING IN HIS HALL OF THE DEAD FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS NOW! WHO'S TO JUDGE WHETHER WHAT HE DOES IS GOOD OR EVIL? BY HIS VERY NATURE THE GRIM REAPER IS ABOVE SUCH MORTAL STANDARDS! HE STANDS TRULY UNIQUE IN THIS UNIVERSE BECAUSE HE IS DEATH!



THUS ENDS MY TALE, CHILD! THE NIGHT IS LATE AND 'TIS TIME SLUMBER BE UPON YOU! SLEEP, JOHNNY, AND MAKE MY GRIM TASK THAT MUCH EASIER!



THAT WHICH LIES BEYOND CAN BE NO WORSE THAN THE DISEASE-PLAGUED LIFE YOU'VE LED UP TO NOW! SO, I MAKE YOUR PASSING AS GENTLE AS POSSIBLE, SON, FOR YOUR POOR SHORT LIFE HAS BEEN HELL ENOUGH!



SO SLEEP ON, MY YOUNG AND INNOCENT ONE, AND DO NOT LOOK UPON THE FACE OF DEATH!



LET THE GATEWAY TO ETERNITY OPEN, AND LET THOSE ALREADY THERE STAND READY TO GREET ITS NEWEST CITIZEN!



SO GOES DEATH!

"TELL ME NOT IN MOURNFUL NUMBERS,
LIFE IS BUT AN EMPTY DREAM;
FOR THE SOUL IS DEAD THAT SLUMBERS
AND THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM.

LIFE IS REAL! LIFE IS EARNEST!
AND THE GRAVE IS NOT ITS GOAL;
DUST THOU ART, TO DUST RETURNEST,
WAS NOT SPOKEN OF THE SOUL."

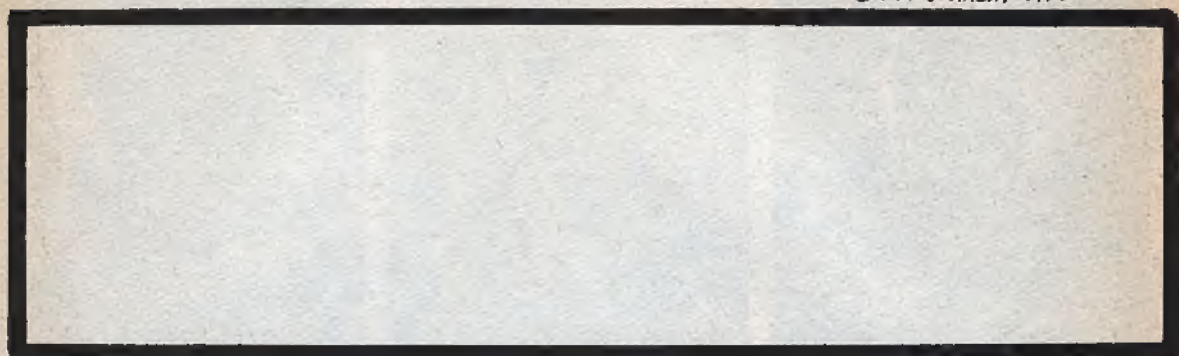
—LONGFELLOW



END

THE ORIGIN OF GOD!

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CODY STARBUCK

by HOWIE
CHAYKIN

